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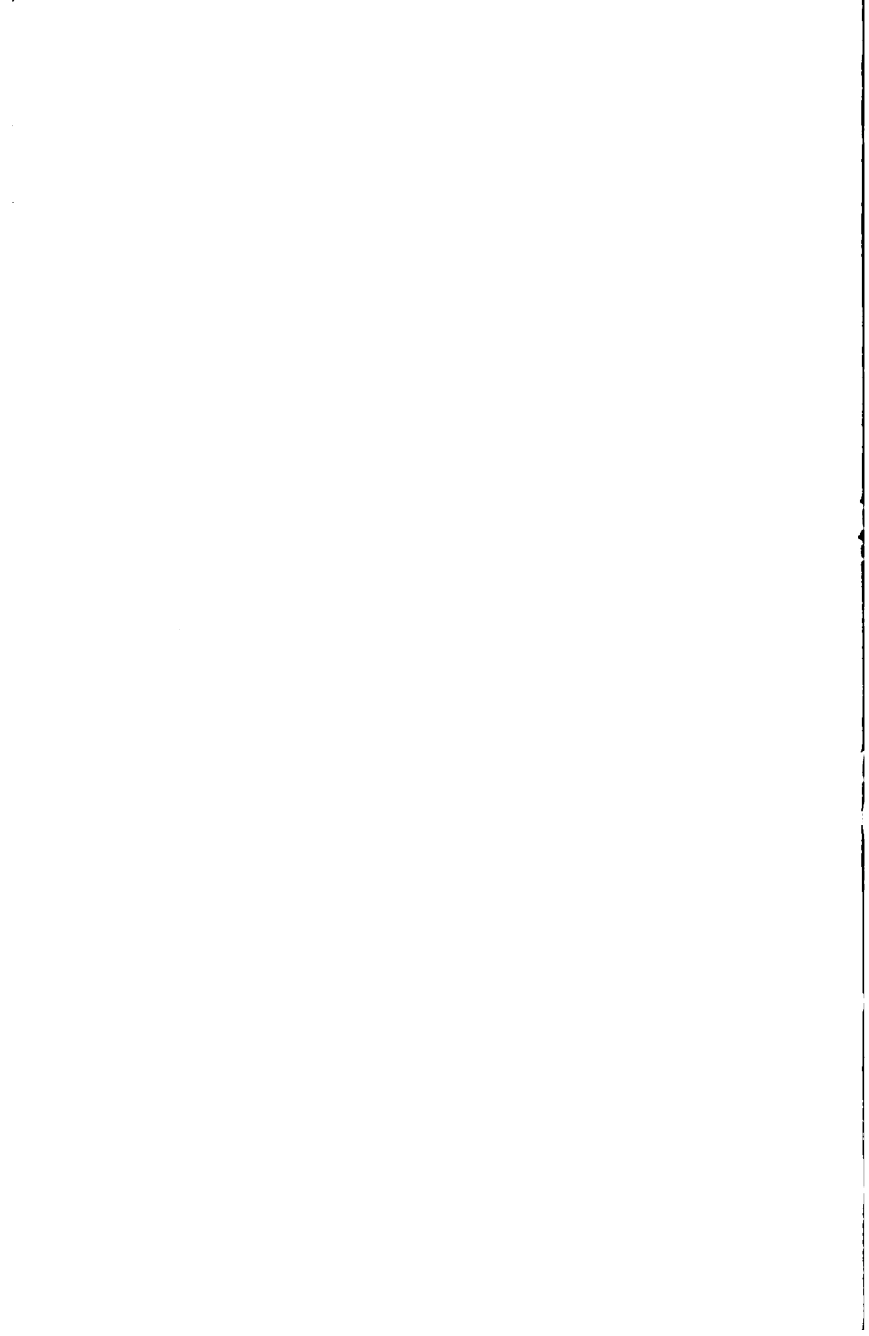


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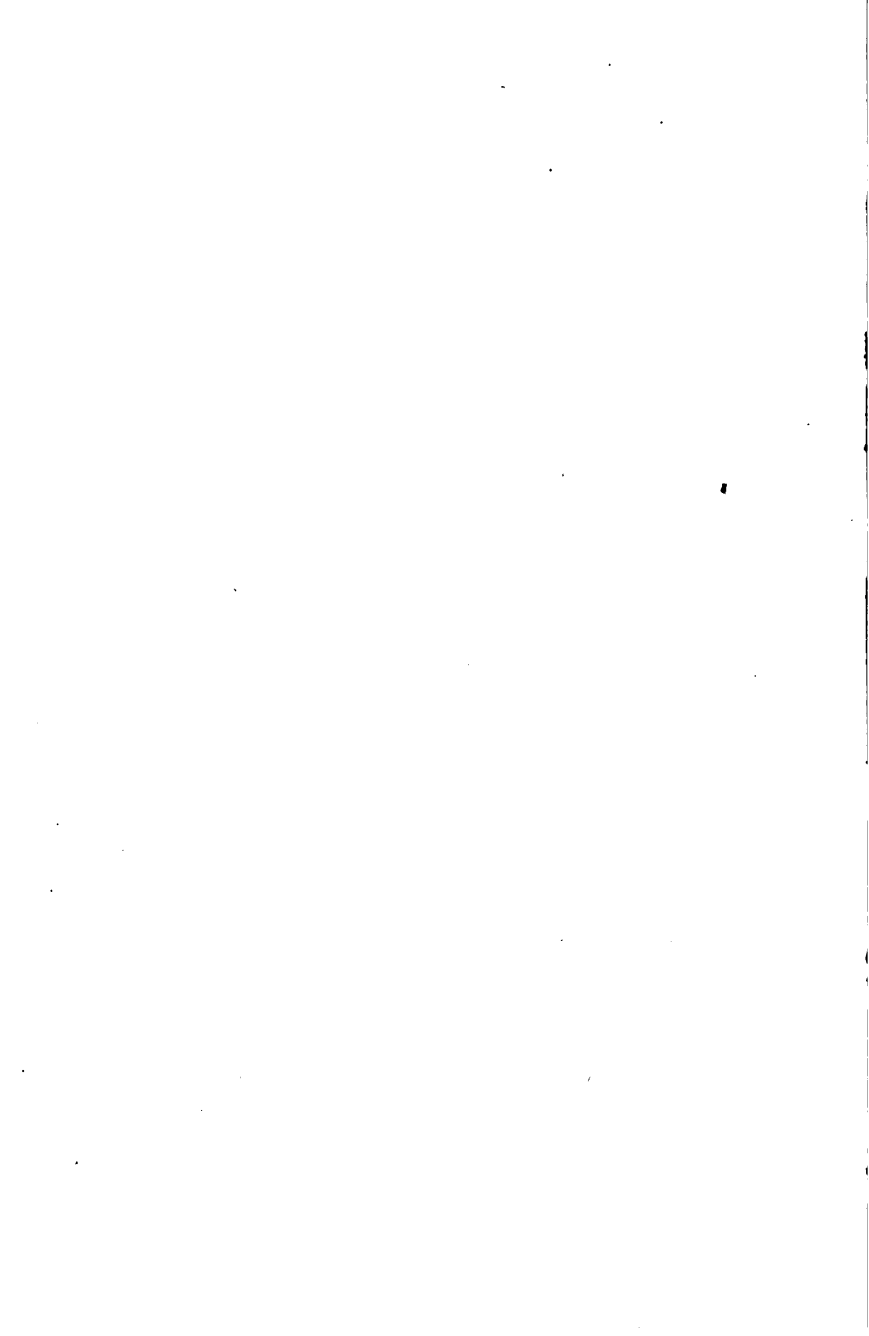


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THE GREEN GOD



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"GENTLEMEN," HE SAID IN A FRIGHTENED SORT OF VOICE,
"MISS TEMPLE CANNOT BE FOUND."

THE GREEN GOD

by

Frederic Arnold Kummer

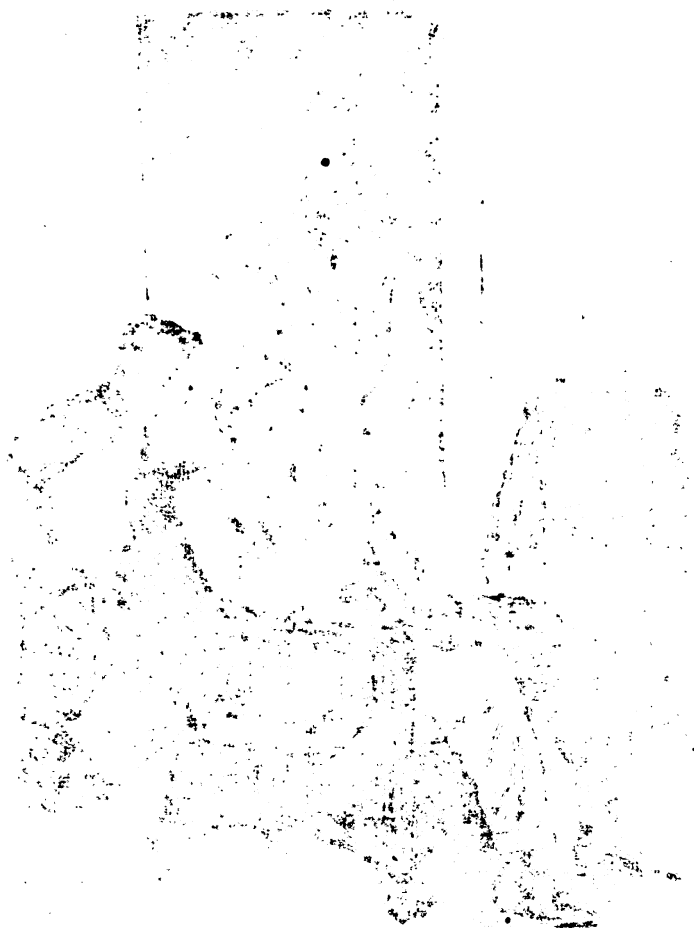
Illustrations by

R. F. Schabelitz

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THE GREEN GOD

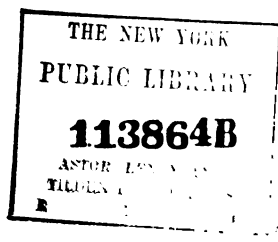
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CHAPTER I

MR. ASHTON

THE dull October afternoon was rapidly drawing to a close as I passed through the village of Pinhoe, and set my steps rather wearily toward Exeter. I had conceived the idea, some time before, of walking from London to Torquay, partly because I felt the need of the exercise and fresh air, and partly because I wanted to do some sketching in the southwest counties. Perhaps had I realized, when I started out, what manner of adventure would befall me in the neighborhood of the town of Exeter, I should have given that place a wide berth. As matters now stood, my chief concern at the moment was

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to decide whether or not I could reach there before the impending storm broke. For a time I had thought of spending the night at the inn at Pinhoe, but, after a careful examination of the wind-swept sky and the masses of dun colored clouds rolling up from the southwest, I decided that I could cover the intervening five miles and reach the Half Moon Hotel in High street before the coming of the storm. I had left Pinhoe perhaps half a mile to the rear, when the strong southwest gale whipped into my face some drops of cold, stinging rain which gave me warning that my calculations as to the proximity of the storm had been anything but correct. I hesitated, uncertain whether to go forward in the face of the gale, or to beat a hasty retreat to the village, when I heard behind me the sound of an approaching automobile.

The car was proceeding at a moderate speed, and as I stepped to the side of the

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road to allow it to pass, it slowed up, and I heard a gruff, but not unpleasant, voice asking me whether I could point out the way to Major Temple's place. I glanced up, and saw a tall, heavily built man, of perhaps some forty years of age, leaning from the rear seat of the motor. He was bronzed and rugged with the mark of the traveler upon him, and although his face at first impressed me unpleasantly, the impression was dispelled in part at least by his peculiarly attractive smile. I informed him that I could not direct him to the place in question, since I was myself a comparative stranger to that part of England. He then asked me if I was going toward Exeter. Upon my informing him not only that I was, but that I was particularly desirous of reaching it before the coming of the rain, he at once invited me to get into the car, with the remark that he could at least carry me the major part of the way.

I hesitated a moment, but, seeing no rea-

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son to refuse the offer, I thanked him and got into the car, and we proceeded toward the town at a fairly rapid rate. My companion seemed disinclined to talk, and puffed nervously at a long cheroot. I lighted my pipe, with some difficulty on account of the wind, and fell to studying the face of the man beside me. He was a good-looking fellow, of a sort, with a somewhat sensuous face, and I felt certain that his short, stubby black mustache concealed a rather cruel mouth. Evidently a man to gain his ends, I thought, without being over nice as to the means he employed. Presently he turned to me. "I understand," he said, "that Major Temple's place is upon the main road, about half a mile this side of Exeter. There is a gray-stone gateway, with a lodge. I shall try the first entrance answering that description. The Major only leased the place recently, so I imagine he is not at all well

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known hereabouts." He leaned forward and spoke to his chauffeur.

I explained my presence upon the Exeter road, and suggested that I would leave the car as soon as we reached the gateway in question, and continue upon foot the balance of my way. My companion nodded, and we smoked in silence for a few moments. Suddenly, with a great swirl of dead leaves, and a squall of cold rain, the storm broke upon us. The force of the gale was terrific, and although the car was provided with a leather top, the wind-swept rain poured in and threatened to drench us to the skin. My companion drew the heavy lap-robe close about his chin, and motioned to me to do likewise, and a moment later we turned quickly into a handsome, gray-stone gateway and up a long, straight gravel road, bordered on each side by a row of beautiful oaks. I glanced up at my new acquaintance in some surprise, but he only smiled and nodded, so I

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said no more, realizing that he could hardly set me down in the face of such a storm.

We swirled over the wet gravel for perhaps a quarter of a mile, through a fine park, and with a swift turn at the end brought up under the porte-cochère of a large, gray-stone house of a peculiar and to me somewhat gloomy and unattractive appearance. The rain, however, was now coming down so heavily, and the wind swept with such furious strength through the moaning trees in the park, that I saw it would be useless to attempt to proceed against it, either on foot or in the motor, so I followed my companion as he stepped from the machine and rang the bell. After a short wait, the door was thrown open by a servant and we hurriedly entered, my acquaintance calling to the chauffeur as we did so to proceed at once to the stables and wait until the rain had moderated before setting out upon his return journey.

We found ourselves in a large, dimly

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lighted hallway. I inspected the man who had admitted us with considerable curiosity as he closed the door behind us, not only because of his Oriental appearance — he was a Chinaman of the better sort — but also because he was dressed in his native garb, his richly embroidered jacket reflecting the faint light of the hall with subdued, yet brilliant, effect. He upon his part showed not the slightest interest in our coming, as he inspected us with his childlike, sleepy eyes. “Tell Major Temple,” said my friend to the man, as he handed him his dripping coat and hat, “that Mr. Robert Ashton is here, and —” He turned to me with a questioning glance. “Owen Morgan,” I replied, wondering if he would know me by name. If he did, he showed no sign. “Just so — Mr. Owen Morgan,” he continued, then strode toward a log fire which crackled and sputtered cheerily upon the hearth of a huge stone fireplace. I gave the man my cap and stick,

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— I was walking in a heavy Norfolk jacket, my portmanteau having been sent ahead by train to Exeter — and joined Mr. Ashton before the fire.

“ I’m afraid I’m rather presuming upon the situation,” I suggested, “ to make myself so much at home here; but perhaps the storm will slacken up presently.”

“ Major Temple will be glad to see you, I’m sure,” rejoined Mr. Ashton, unconcernedly. “ You can’t possibly go on, you know — listen!” He waved his hand toward the leaded windows against which the storm was now driving with furious force.

“ I’m afraid not,” I answered, a bit ungraciously. I have a deep-rooted dislike to imposing myself upon strangers, and I felt that my unceremonious arrival at the house of Major Temple might be less appreciated by that gentleman than my companion seemed to think likely.

“ The Major is a queer old character,” Mr. Ashton remarked, “ great traveler

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and collector. I'm here on a matter of business myself — partly at least. He'll be glad to meet you. I fancy he's a bit lonely with nobody to keep him company but his daughter. Here he comes now." He turned toward a tall, spare man with gray hair and drooping gray mustache, who entered the hall. His face, like Ashton's, had the dull, burnt-in tone of brown which is acquired only by long exposure to the sun, and which usually marks its possessor as a traveler in the hot countries. "Ah, Ashton," exclaimed the Major, dropping his monocle, "delighted to see you. You arrived yesterday?" — He extended his hand, which Ashton grasped warmly.

"Late yesterday. You see I lost no time in coming to report the result of my quest."

"And you were successful?" demanded the older man, excitedly.

"Entirely so," replied Ashton with a smile of satisfaction.

"Good — good!" The Major rubbed

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his hands and smiled, then apparently observing me for the first time, glanced at Mr. Ashton with a slight frown and an interrogative expression.

"Mr. Owen Morgan," said Ashton, lightly, "on his way to Exeter with me. I took the liberty of bringing him in, on account of the storm."

"I am ready to go on at once," I interjected stiffly, "as soon as the rain lets up a bit."

"Nonsense — nonsense!" The Major's voice was somewhat testy. "You can't possibly proceed on a night like this. Make yourself at home, Sir. Any friend of Mr. Ashton's is welcome here." He waved aside my protestations and turned to one of the servants, who had entered the room to turn on the lights. "Show Mr. Ashton and Mr. Morgan to their rooms, Gibson. You'll be wanting to fix up a bit before dinner," he announced.

"I'm afraid I can't dress," I said rue-

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fully; "my things have all gone on to Exeter by train."

The Major favored me with a sympathetic smile. "I quite understand," he said; "traveler's luck. I've been a bit of a traveler myself, in my day, Mr. Morgan. My daughter will understand perfectly."

"Which rooms, Sir, shall I show the gentlemen to?" asked the man, a trifle uneasily, I thought.

The Major looked at Ashton, and laughed. "Ashton," he said, "you know I only took this place a short time ago on my return from my last trip to the East, and as we do not have many visitors, it's a bit musty and out of shape. Queer old house, I fancy. Been closed, until I let it, for years. Supposed to be haunted or something of the sort — tales of wandering spirits and all that. I imagine it won't worry you much." He glanced from Ashton to myself with a quick smile of interrogation.

"Hardly," replied my companion, light-

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ing a cigarette. "I've outgrown ghosts. Lead on to the haunted chamber."

The Major turned to the servant. "Show the gentlemen to the two rooms in the west wing, Gibson. The green room will suit Mr. Ashton, I fancy, and perhaps Mr. Morgan will find the white and gold room across the hall comfortable for the night."

"Very good, Sir." The man turned toward the staircase and we followed him.

I found my room a large and fairly comfortable one, containing a great maple bed, a chest of drawers and other furniture of an old-fashioned sort. The place seemed stuffy with the peculiar dead atmosphere of rooms long closed, but I soon dispelled this by throwing open one of the windows upon that side of the room away from the force of the storm, and busied myself in making such preparations for dinner as I could with the few requisites which my small knapsack contained. I heard Ashton across the hall,

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whistling merrily as he got into evening kit, and rather grumbled at myself for having been drawn into my present position as an unbidden and unprepared guest in the house of persons who were total strangers to me.

After a considerable time, I heard the musical notes of a Chinese gong which I took to be the signal for dinner, so making my way to the staircase with, I fear, a somewhat sheepish expression, I saw Ashton ahead of me, just joining at the end of the hallway a strikingly beautiful and distinguished-looking girl, of perhaps twenty-two or three, dressed in an evening gown of white, the very simplicity of which only served to accentuate the splendid lines of her figure. Her face was pale with that healthy pallor which is in some women so beautiful — a sort of warm ivory tint — and with her splendid eyes and wide brow, crowded with a mass of bronze-colored hair, I felt that even my critical artistic taste could with difficulty find a flaw. It

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was evident that she and Mr. Ashton knew each other well, yet it seemed to me that Miss Temple, for so I supposed the young lady to be, did not respond with much cordiality to the effusive greeting which Mr. Ashton bestowed upon her. I descended the steps some distance behind them, and observed Major Temple standing in the center of the main hall, smiling with much apparent satisfaction at the couple ahead of me as they advanced toward him. As I joined them, Major Temple presented me to his daughter as a friend of Mr. Ashton's, which, it appeared to me, did not predispose that young lady particularly in my favor, judging by the coldness with which she received me, and then we all proceeded to the dining-room.

The dinner was excellently cooked, and was served by the same almond-eyed Chinaman who had admitted us upon our arrival. I learned afterwards that the Major was an enthusiastic student of Oriental art, and

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that his collection of porcelains and carved ivory and jewels was one of the finest in England. He had, it appeared, spent a great portion of his life in the East and had only just returned from a stay of over a year in China, during which he had penetrated far into the interior, into that portion of the country lying toward Thibet, where Europeans do not usually go.

During dinner, Major Temple and Mr. Ashton talked continually of China, and referred frequently to "it," and to "the stone," although at the time I did not grasp the meaning of their references. I attempted without much success to carry on a conversation with Miss Temple, but she seemed laboring under intense excitement and unable to give my efforts any real attention, so I gradually found myself listening to the talk between Major Temple and Mr. Ashton. As near as I could gather, the latter had set out from Hong Kong some months before, on a search for a cer-

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tain stone or jewel which Major Temple desired for his collection, and after an adventurous trip during which he had been forced at the risk of his life to remain disguised as a coolie for some weeks, had finally escaped and returned to England. There was also some talk of a reward, though of what nature I did not understand, but it seemed to give Mr. Ashton great satisfaction, and to cause Major Temple much uneasiness every time it was mentioned, and I saw him glance frequently, covertly, at the blanched face of his daughter. As Mr. Ashton brought his thrilling story to a conclusion, he drew from his waistcoat pocket a small, green leather case, evidently of Chinese workmanship, and, opening it, turned out upon the white cloth what I at first thought to be a small figure of green glass, which on closer inspection proved to be a miniature representation of the god Buddha, standing somewhat above an inch and a half in height, and wonderfully cut from a single

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flawless emerald. I looked up at Ashton in amazement as he allowed the gas light to play upon its marvelous beauty of color and the delicate workmanship of its face and figure, then rolled it across the table toward Miss Temple. It represented the well-known figure of the god, sitting with arms extended upon its knees, its face so exquisitely chiseled that the calm, beneficent smile was as perfect, the features as exact, as though the figure had been of life size. As the wonderful sparkling gem flashed across the white cloth in the direction of Miss Temple, the latter started back in dismay and an expression of intense horror passed over her face as she looked up and caught the burning eyes of Mr. Ashton fixed upon hers. She returned his gaze defiantly for a moment, then lowered her eyes and composed her features behind the cold and impassive mask she had worn throughout the evening.

Ashton flushed a sullen red, then picked

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up the jewel and set it carelessly upon the top of a cut-glass salt cellar, turning it this way and that to catch the light. As he did so, I observed the Chinese servant enter the doorway opposite me with cigars, cigarettes and an alcohol lamp upon a tray, and I was startled to see his wooden, impassive face light up with a glare of sudden anger and alarm as he caught sight of the jewel. Major Temple, observing him at the same moment, quickly covered the figure with his hand, and the Chinaman, resuming almost instantly his customary look of childlike unconcern, proceeded to offer us the contents of the tray as Miss Temple rose and left the table. I instinctively felt that Mr. Ashton and his host desired to be alone, so, after lighting my cigar, I excused myself and strolled into the great hall where I stood with my back to the welcome fire, listening to the howling of the storm without.

I had been standing there for perhaps fifteen minutes or more, when suddenly I

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observed Miss Temple come quickly into the hall from a door on the opposite side of the stairway. She looked about cautiously for a moment, then approached me with an eager, nervous smile. I could not help observing, as she drew near, how the beauty of her delicate, mobile face was marred by her evident suffering. Her large dark eyes were swollen and heavy as from much weeping and loss of sleep.

"You are a friend of Mr. Ashton's," she asked earnestly as she came up to me. "Have you known him long?"

"Miss Temple, I am afraid I can hardly claim to be a friend of Mr. Ashton's at all. As a matter of fact I never met him before this afternoon."

She seemed vastly surprised. "But I thought you came with him," she said.

I explained my presence, and mentioned my work, and my purpose in making a walking tour along the southwest coast.

"Then you are Owen Morgan, the

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illustrator," she cried, with a brilliant smile. "I know your work very well, and I am delighted to meet you. I was afraid you, too, were in the conspiracy." Her face darkened, and again the expression of suffering fell athwart it like the shadow of a cloud.

"The conspiracy?" I asked, much mystified. "What conspiracy?"

Miss Temple looked apprehensively toward the door leading to the dining-room, then her eyes sought mine and she gave me a searching look. "I am all alone here, Mr. Morgan," she said at last, "and I need a friend very badly. I wonder if I can depend upon you — trust you."

It is needless to say that I was surprised at her words, as well as the impressive manner in which she spoke them. I assured her that I would be only too happy to serve her in any way in my power. "But what is it that you fear?" I inquired, soothingly, wondering if after all I was not dealing with

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a somewhat excitable child. Her next words, however, showed me that this was far from being the case.

“ My father,” she said, hurriedly, lowering her voice, “ is a madman on the subject of jewels. He has spent his whole life in collecting them. He would give anything — anything! — to possess some curio upon which he had set his desires. Last year, in China, he saw by accident the emerald you have just seen. It was the sacred relic of a Buddhist temple in Ping Yang, and is said to have come from the holy city of Lhasa in Thibet. His offers to purchase it were laughed at, and when he persisted in them, he was threatened with violence as being a foreign devil and was forced to leave the city to avoid trouble. He has never since ceased to covet this jewel, and upon his arrival in Hong Kong, and before setting out for England, he made the acquaintance of this man Ashton, who is a sort of agent and collector for several of the

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curio dealers in London. We remained in Hong Kong for several weeks before setting sail for England, and during this time, Mr. Ashton persecuted me with his attentions, and made me an offer of marriage, which, in spite of my refusal, he repeated several times. Imagine my amazement, then, when my father, on our arrival in England, told me that he had commissioned Mr. Ashton to obtain the emerald Buddha for him, and had agreed, in the event of his success, to give him my hand in marriage. My prayers, my appeals, were all equally useless. He informed me that Mr. Ashton was a gentleman, that he had given him his word, and could not break it. I was forced into a semi-acquiescence to the arrangement, believing that Mr. Ashton could never succeed in his mad attempt, and had almost forgotten the matter when suddenly my father received word from Mr. Ashton that he had arrived at Southampton yesterday and would reach here this even-

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ing. I went to my father and asked him to assure me that he would not insist upon carrying out his inhuman promise, in the event of Mr. Ashton's success, but he only put me off, bidding me wait until the result of his trip was known. I learned it at dinner to-night, and realize from Mr. Ashton's manner that he intends to assert his claim upon me to the fullest extent. Whatever happens, Mr. Morgan, I shall never marry Robert Ashton — never! I would do anything before I would consent to that. I do not know what my father will ask of me, but if he asks that, I shall leave this house to-morrow, and I beg that you will take me with you, until I can find some occupation that will enable me to support myself."

Her story filled me with the deepest astonishment. I thrust out my hand and grasped hers, carried away by the fervor and impetuosity of her words, as well as by her beauty and evident suffering. "You can depend upon me absolutely," I

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exclaimed. "My mother is at Torquay, to which place I am bound. She will be glad to welcome you, Miss Temple."

"Thank you — thank you!" she cried in her deep, earnest voice. "Do not leave in the morning until I have seen you. Good-night." She hastened toward the stairway and as she ascended it, threw back at me a smile of such sweet gratitude and relief that I felt repaid for all that I had promised.

I stood for a while, smoking and thinking over this queer situation, when suddenly my attention was attracted by the sound of loud voices coming from the direction of the dining-room, as though Major Temple and his guest were engaged in a violent quarrel. I could not make out what they were saying, nor indeed did I attempt to do so, when suddenly I was startled by the sound of a loud crash and the jingling of glassware, and Mr. Ashton burst into the hall, evidently in a state of violent anger, followed by Major Temple, equally ex-

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cited and angry. "I hold you to your contract," the former shouted. "By God, you'll live up to it, or I'll know the reason why." "I'll pay, damn it, I'll pay," cried Major Temple, angrily, "but not a penny to boot." Ashton turned and faced him. They neither of them saw me, and in their excitement failed to hear the cough with which I attempted to apprise them of my presence. "Don't you realize that that emerald is worth a hundred thousand pounds?" cried Ashton in a rage. "You promised me your daughter, if I got it for you, but you've got to pay me for the stone in addition."

"Not a penny," cried Major Temple.

"Then I'll take it to London and let Crothers have it."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me and see."

"Come, now, Ashton." The Major's voice was wheedling, persuasive. "What did the stone cost you — merely the cost of

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the trip, wasn't it? I'll pay that, if you like."

"And I risked my life a dozen times, to get you the jewel! You must be mad."

"How much do you want?"

"Fifty thousand pounds, and not a penny less."

"I'll not pay it."

"Then you don't get the stone."

"It's mine — I told you of it. Without my help you could have done nothing. I demand it. It is my property. You were acting only as my agent. Give it to me." Major Temple was beside himself with excitement.

"I'll see you damned first," cried Ashton, now thoroughly angry.

The Major glared at him, pale with fury. "I'll never let you leave the house with it," he cried.

By this time my repeated coughing and shuffling of my feet had attracted their attention, and they both hastened to conceal

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their anger. I felt however that I had heard too much as it was, so, bidding them a hasty good-night, I repaired as quickly as possible to my room and at once turned in.

CHAPTER II

A CRY IN THE MORNING

I WAS thoroughly tired out by my long day in the open, and I must have gone to sleep at once. It seemed to me that I was disturbed, during the night, by the sound of voices without my door, and the movements of people in the hallway, but I presume it was merely a dream. Just before daybreak, however, I found myself suffering somewhat from the cold, and got up to close one of the windows, to shut off the draught. I had just turned toward the bed again, when I heard from the room across the hall, the one occupied by Mr. Ashton, a sudden and terrible cry as of someone in mortal agony, followed by the sound of a heavy body falling upon the floor. I also fancied I heard the quick closing of a door

A CRY IN THE MORNING

or window, but of this I could not be sure. With a foreboding of tragedy heavily upon me, I hastily threw on some clothes and ran into the hall, calling loudly for help. Opposite me was the door of Mr. Ashton's room. I rushed to it, and tried the knob, but found it locked. For some time I vainly attempted to force open the door, meanwhile repeating my cries. Presently Major Temple came running through the hallway, followed by his daughter and several of the servants. Miss Temple had thrown on a long silk Chinese wrapper and even in the dim light of the hall I could not help observing the ghastly pallor of her face.

"What's wrong here?" cried Major Temple, excitedly.

"I do not know, Sir," I replied, gravely enough. "I heard a cry which seemed to come from Mr. Ashton's room, but I find his door locked."

"Break it in," cried Major Temple;

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“break it in at once.” At his words, one of the servants and myself threw our combined weight against the door, and after several attempts, the fastening gave way, and we were precipitated headlong into the room. It was dark, and it seemed to me that the air was heavy and lifeless. We drew back into the hall as one of the servants came running up with a candle, and Major Temple, taking it, advanced into the room, closely followed by myself. At first our eyes did not take in the scene revealed by the flickering candlelight, but in a few moments the gruesome sight before us caused both Major Temple and myself to recoil sharply toward the doorway. Upon the floor lay Robert Ashton in his night-clothes, his head in a pool of blood, his hands outstretched before him, his face ghastly with terror. The Major at once ordered the servants to keep out of the room, then turned to his daughter and in a low voice requested her to retire. She did so



"BREAK IT IN." CRIED MAJOR TEMPLE, "BREAK IT IN."

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A CRY IN THE MORNING

at once, in a state of terrible excitement. He then closed the door behind us, and, after lighting the gas, we proceeded to examine the body. Ashton was dead, although death had apparently occurred but a short time before as his body was still warm. In the top of his head was found a deep circular wound, apparently made by some heavy, sharp-pointed instrument, but there were no other marks of violence, no other wounds of any sort upon the body. I examined the wound in the head carefully, but could not imagine any weapon which would have left such a mark. And then the wonder of the situation began to dawn upon me. The room contained, besides the door by which we had entered, three windows, two facing to the south and one to the west. All three were tightly closed and securely fastened with heavy bolts on the inside. There was absolutely no other means of entrance to the room whatever, except the door which we had

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broken open and a rapid examination of this showed me that it had been bolted upon the inside, and the catch into which the bolt slid upon the door-jamb had been torn from its fastenings by the effort we had used in forcing it open. I turned to Major Temple in amazement, and found that he was engaged in systematically searching Mr. Ashton's gladstone bag, which lay upon a chair near the bed. He examined each article in detail, heedless of the grim and silent figure upon the floor beside him, and, when he had concluded, bent over the prostrate form of the dead man and began a hurried search of his person and the surrounding floor. I observed him in astonishment. "The police must never find it," I heard him mutter; "the police must never find it." He rose to his feet with an exclamation of disappointment. "Where can it be?" he muttered, half to himself, apparently forgetful of my presence. He looked about the room and then with a sud-

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den cry dashed at a table near the window. I followed his movements and saw upon the table the small, green leather case from which Ashton had produced the emerald at dinner the night before. Major Temple took up the case with a sigh of relief, and hastily opened it, then dashed it to the floor with an oath. The case was empty.

"It's gone!" he fairly screamed. "My God, it's gone!"

"Impossible," I said, gravely. "The windows are all tightly shut and bolted. We had to break in the door. No one could have entered or left this room since Mr. Ashton came into it."

"Nonsense!" Major Temple snorted, angrily. "Do you suppose Ashton smashed in his own skull by way of amusement?"

He turned to the bed and began to search it closely, removing the pillows, feeling beneath the mattresses, even taking the candle and examining the floor foot by foot. Once more he went over the contents of the port-

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manteau, then again examined the clothing of the dead man, but all to no purpose. The emerald Buddha was as clearly and evidently gone as though it had vanished into the surrounding ether.

During this search, I had been vainly trying to put together some intelligent solution of this remarkable affair. There was clearly no possibility that Ashton had inflicted this wound upon himself in falling, yet the supposition that someone had entered the room from without seemed nullified by the bolted door and windows. I proceeded to closer examination of the matter.

The body lay with its head toward the window in the west wall of the room, and some six or eight feet from the window, and an even greater distance from the walls on either side. There was no piece of furniture, no heavy object, anywhere near at hand. I looked again at the queer, round conical hole in the top of the dead man's

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head. It had evidently been delivered from above. I glanced up, and saw only the dim, unbroken expanse of the ceiling above me, papered in white. I turned, absolutely nonplused, to Major Temple, who stood staring with protruding eyes at something upon the floor near one of the windows. He picked it up, and handed it to me. "What do you make of that?" he asked, in a startled voice, handing me what appeared to be a small piece of tough Chinese paper. Upon it was inscribed, in black, a single Chinese letter. I glanced at it, then handed it back, with the remark that I could make nothing of it.

"It is the symbol of the god," he said, "the Buddha. The same sign was engraved upon the base of the emerald figure, and I saw it in the temple at Ping Yang, upon the temple decorations. What is it doing here?" Then his face lighted up with a sudden idea. He rushed to the door, and opened it. "Gibson," he called per-

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emptorily, to his man without, "find Li Min and bring him here at once. Don't let him out of your sight for a moment."

The man was gone ten minutes or more, during which time Major Temple walked excitedly up and down the room, muttering continually something about the police.

"They must be notified," I said, at last. He turned to me with a queer, half-frightened look. "They can do no good, no good, whatever," he cried. "This is the work of one of the Chinese secret societies. They are the cleverest criminals in the world. I have lived among them, and I know."

"Even the cleverest criminals in the world couldn't bolt a door or window from the outside," I said.

"Do not be too sure of that. I have known them to do things equally strange. By inserting a thin steel wedge between the edge of the door and the jamb they might with infinite patience work the bolt to one

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side or the other. This fellow, Li Min, I brought from China with me. He is one of the most faithful servants I have ever known. He belongs to the higher orders of society — I mean that he is not of the peasant or coolie class. He represented to me that he was suspected of belonging to the Reform Association, the enemies of the prevailing order of things, and was obliged to leave the country to save his head. I do not know, I do not know — possibly he may have been sent to watch. They knew in Ping Yang that I was after the emerald Buddha. Who knows? They are an amazing people — an amazing people.” He turned to me suddenly. “Did you hear any footsteps or other noises in the hallway during the night?”

I told him that I thought I had, but that I could not be sure, that my sleep had been troubled, but that I had only awakened a few minutes before I heard Ashton’s cry. At this moment Gibson returned, with a

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scared look on his face. Li Min, he reported, had disappeared. No one had seen him since the night before. His room had apparently been occupied, but the Chinaman was nowhere to be found.

"The police must be notified at once," I urged.

"I will attend to it," said the Major. "First we must have some coffee."

He closed the door of the room carefully, after we left it, and, taking the key from the lock — it had evidently not been used by Mr. Ashton the night before — locked the door from the outside and ordered Gibson to remain in the hallway without and allow no one to approach.

We finished dressing and then had a hurried cup of coffee and some muffins in the breakfast-room. It was by now nearly eight o'clock, and I suggested to Major Temple that if he wished, I would drive into Exeter with one of his men, notify the police and at the same time get my luggage.

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I assured him that I had no desire to inflict myself upon him further as a guest, but that the murder of Ashton and the necessity of my appearing as a witness at the forthcoming inquest made it imperative that I should remain upon the scene until the police were satisfied to have me depart. At my mention of the police the Major showed great uneasiness, as before.

"You need not say anything about the — the emerald," he said, slowly; "it would only create unnecessary talk and trouble."

"I'm afraid I must," I replied. "It is evidently the sole motive for the murder — it has disappeared, and unless the police are apprised of its part in the case, I fail to see how they can intelligently proceed in their attempts to unravel the mystery."

He shook his head slowly. "What a pity!" he remarked. "What a pity! If the stone is ever found now, the authorities will hold it as the property of the dead man or his relations, if indeed he has any.

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And it would have been the crowning glory of my collection." It was evident that Major Temple was far more concerned over the loss of the emerald than over the death of Robert Ashton. "But they will never find it—never!" he concluded with a cunning smile, and an assurance that startled me. I wondered for a moment whether Major Temple knew more about the mysterious death of Robert Ashton than appeared upon the surface, but, recollecting his excited search of the dead man's belongings, dismissed the idea as absurd. It recurred, however, from time to time during my short drive to Exeter, and the thought came to me that if Major Temple could in any way have caused or been cognizant of the death of Robert Ashton from without the room—without entering it—his first act after doing so would naturally have been to search for the emerald in the hope of securing it before the police had been summoned to take charge of the case. I

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regretted that I had not examined the floor of the attic above, to determine whether any carefully fitted trap door, or hidden chimney or other opening to the interior of the room below existed. I also felt that it was imperative that a careful examination of the walls, as well as of the ground outside beneath the three windows, should be made without delay. It was even possible, I conjectured, that a clever thief could have in some way cut out one of the window panes, making an opening through which the window might have been opened and subsequently rebolted, though just how the glass could then have been replaced was a problem I was not prepared to solve. There was no question, however, that Robert Ashton was dead, and that whoever had inflicted that deadly wound upon his head, and made away with the emerald Buddha, must have entered the room in some way. I was not yet prepared to base any hypotheses upon the supernatural. As I concluded

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these reflections, we entered the town by way of Sidwell street and I stopped at the Half Moon and secured my luggage. We then drove to the police headquarters and I explained the case hurriedly to the Chief Constable, omitting all details except those pertaining directly to Mr. Ashton's death. The Chief Constable sent one of his men into an inner room, who returned in a moment with a small, keen-looking, ferret-faced man of some forty-eight or fifty years of age, with gray hair, sharp gray eyes and a smooth-shaven face. He introduced him to me as Sergeant McQuade, of Scotland Yard, who it seemed, happened to be in the city upon some counterfeiting case or other, and suggested that he accompany me back to the house. We had driven in Major Temple's high Irish cart, and, putting the man behind, I took the reins and with Sergeant McQuade beside me, started back in the direction of The Oaks. We had scarcely left the limits of the town behind

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us, when I noticed a figure in blue plodding slowly along the muddy road ahead of us, in the same direction as ourselves, and Jones, the groom upon the drag behind me said, in a low voice as we drew alongside, that it was Li Min, Major Temple's Chinese servant, whose sudden disappearance earlier in the morning had caused so much excitement. The Chinaman looked at us with a blandly innocent face and, nodding pleasantly, bade us good morning. I stopped the cart and ordered Jones to get down and accompany him back to the house, and on no account to let him out of his sight. As we drove on I explained all the circumstances of the case in detail to Sergeant McQuade, and informed him of my reason for placing Jones as guard over the Chinaman. No sooner had I done so than the Sergeant, in some excitement, requested me to return with him to Exeter at once. I did not inquire into his reasons for this step, but turned my horse's head

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once more toward the town, the Sergeant meanwhile plying me with questions, many of which I regretted my inability to answer to his satisfaction. They related principally to the exact time at which the murder had occurred, and how soon the disappearance of Li Min had been discovered. I decided at once that the detective had concluded that Li Min had committed the murder and had then hurried off to Exeter to place the emerald Buddha in the hands of some of his countrymen in the town, and was now proceeding leisurely back with some plausible story and a carefully arranged alibi to explain his absence from the house. I mentioned my conclusions to the Sergeant and saw from his reply that my assumption was correct. "I hope we are not too late," he exclaimed as he suggested my urging the horse to greater speed. "It is absolutely necessary that we prevent any Chinaman from leaving the town until this matter is cleared up. I'm afraid however,

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that they have a good start of us. There is a train to London at eight, and, if our man got away on that, it will be no easy matter to reach him."

"Of course you can telegraph ahead," I ventured.

"Of course." The detective smiled. "But the train is not an express, and there are a dozen stations within fifty miles of here where anyone could leave the train before I can get word along the line." He looked at his watch. "It is now ten minutes of nine. I am sorry that you did not notify the police at once." I made no reply, not wishing to prejudice the detective against Major Temple by explaining my desire to do this very thing and the latter's disinclination to have it done. We had reached police headquarters by this time, and the Sergeant disappeared within for perhaps five minutes, then quickly rejoined me and directed me to drive to the Queen Street Station. I waited here for him quite

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a long time and at last he came back with a face expressive of much dissatisfaction. "Two of them went up on the eight train," he growled. "One of them the clerk in the booking office remembers as keeping a laundry in Frog Street. The other he had never seen. They took tickets for London, third class." He swung himself into the seat beside me and sat in silence all the way to the house, evidently thinking deeply.

When we arrived at The Oaks, very soon after, we found the Major waiting impatiently for us in the hall. Jones and Li Min had arrived, and the Major had subjected the latter, he informed us, to a severe cross-examination, with the result that the Chinaman had denied all knowledge of Mr. Ashton's death and explained his absence from the house by saying that he had gone into town the night before to see his brother who had recently arrived from China, and, knowing the habit of the

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household to breakfast very late, had supposed his return at nine o'clock would pass unnoticed. I made Major Temple acquainted with Sergeant McQuade, and we proceeded at once to the room where lay all that now remained of the unfortunate Robert Ashton.

CHAPTER III

A QUEER DISCOVERY

WE found Gibson guarding the door where we had left him. Miss Temple was nowhere to be seen. Major Temple took the key from his pocket, and, throwing open the room, allowed McQuade and myself to enter, he following us and closing the door behind him.

“Where did you get the key?” asked the detective as Major Temple joined us.

“It was in the door — on the inside.”

“Had the door been locked?”

“No. It was bolted.”

“And you broke it open when you entered?”

“Yes. Mr. Morgan and my man, Gibson, forced it together.”

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McQuade stepped to the door and examined the bolt carefully. The socket into which the bolt shot was an old-fashioned brass affair and had been fastened with two heavy screws to the door jamb. These screws had been torn from the wood by the united weight of Gibson and myself when we broke open the door. The socket, somewhat bent, with the screws still in place, was lying upon the floor some distance away. McQuade picked it up and examined it carefully, then threw it aside. He next proceeded to make a careful and minute examination of the bolt, but I judged from his expression that he discovered nothing of importance, for he turned impatiently from the door and, crossing the room, bent over the dead man and looked long and searchingly at the curious wound in his head. He then examined the fastenings of the windows minutely, and, raising one of the large windows in the south wall, looked out. Evidently nothing attracted

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his attention outside. He turned from the window, after closing it again, and started toward us, then stooped suddenly and picked up a small white object which lay near one of the legs of a table standing near the window. It was in plain view, and I wondered that I had not seen it during my previous examination of the room. McQuade handed the object, a small bit of lace, I thought, to Major Temple. "What do you make of that?" he asked.

Major Temple took the thing and spread it out, and I at once saw that it was a woman's handkerchief. My surprise at this was overbalanced by the look of horror which spread over the Major's face. He became deathly pale, and his hand shook violently as he looked at the bit of lace before him. I stepped to his side and saw, as did he, the initials, M. T., in one corner and noticed a strong and most peculiar odor of perfume, some curious Oriental scent that rose from the handkerchief.

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McQuade gazed at us, curiously intent. "Do you recognize it?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Major Temple, recovering himself with an effort. "It is my daughter's."

"How do you explain its presence here?" asked the detective.

"I do not attempt to do so, any more than I can undertake to explain any of the other strange events connected with this horrible affair," said the Major, pathetically. He seemed to me to have aged perceptibly since the evening before; he looked broken, old.

McQuade took the handkerchief and placed it carefully in his pocket, and continued his examination of the room. As he did so, I stood aside, a prey to strange thoughts. I felt ready to swear that the handkerchief had not been upon the floor during my previous examination of the room, yet how could its presence there now be explained, with the door locked, the key

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in Major Temple's pocket, and Gibson on guard in the hall. I thought of Muriel Temple, young, beautiful, innocent in every outward appearance, yet remembered with a qualm of misgiving her flashing eyes and determined manner as she spoke of Robert Ashton, her aversion to him, and her determination never to marry him under any circumstances. I felt that there was more beneath this strange tragedy than had yet appeared upon the surface, yet, believing thoroughly in the innocence of Miss Temple of any part in the affair, I mentally resolved to do all in my power to sift it to the bottom. I had no illusions as to any special skill upon my part as an amateur detective, and I did not propose to come forth equipped with magnifying glass and tape measure and solve the problem in the usual half-hour which sufficed for the superhuman sleuth of fiction, but I felt that I did possess common sense and a reasonably acute brain, and I believed that, with

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sufficient time and effort, I could find out how and why Robert Ashton had come to his sudden and tragic end. My thoughts were interrupted by Sergeant McQuade, who, having brought his examination to a sudden close, announced to Major Temple that the police and the divisional surgeon would arrive shortly and that meanwhile he would have a look at the grounds beneath the windows of the room. I decided to accompany him, but, before doing so, I suggested to the Major that it might be well to show Sergeant McQuade the scrap of paper, containing the single Chinese character, which we had found upon the floor. Major Temple took it from his pocket and handed it to the detective without a word. I could see that the latter was puzzled. "What does it mean?" he inquired. "Do you know?" He turned to Major Temple.

"Only that it is a religious symbol used by the Buddhist priests in China," said the

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latter. "It is found in their temples, and is supposed to ward off evil influences."

"Is there any reason to suppose," inquired McQuade, "that its presence here indicates that the room has been entered by Li Min or any of his countrymen, in an attempt to recover the emerald which I understand Mr. Ashton had with him? Might it not equally well have belonged to the dead man himself — a copy, perhaps, made by him of the character — a curiosity in other words, which he might have desired to preserve?"

I followed his line of reasoning. I had told him nothing of the relations between Miss Temple and Ashton, but it was evident that the finding of her handkerchief in the murdered man's room had started him off on another tack.

"None whatever," the Major responded. "Yet since the jewel has disappeared, its recovery was in my opinion beyond question the reason for the murder, and but four

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persons knew of the presence of the jewel in this house."

"And they were —?" The detective paused.

"My daughter, Mr. Morgan, Li Min, and myself."

"How did Li Min come to know of it?"

"He saw us examining it at dinner last night, while waiting on the table."

The detective pondered. "Was the stone of such value that its recovery would have been sought at so great a cost?" He glanced gravely at the silent figure upon the floor.

"Intrinsically it was worth perhaps a hundred thousand pounds — as a curio, or as an object of religious veneration among the Buddhist priests and their followers, it was priceless." Major Temple spoke with the fervor and enthusiasm of the collector.

Sergeant McQuade's eyes widened at this statement. "A hundred thousand pounds!" he exclaimed. "And you intended to buy it from Mr. Ashton?"

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The Major hesitated. "Yes," he stammered, "yes, I did."

"At what price?" came the question, cold and incisive.

"I — I — Mr. Ashton secured the jewel for me as my agent."

"But surely you were to give him some commission, some reward for his trouble. What was that reward, Major Temple?"

"I had promised him the hand of my daughter in marriage."

"And was he satisfied with that settlement?" continued the detective, ruthlessly.

"We had a slight disagreement. He — he wanted a cash payment in addition."

"Which you refused?"

"The matter had not been settled."

"And how did your daughter regard the bargain?" asked McQuade, coldly.

Major Temple drew himself up stiffly. "I fail to see the purpose of these questions," he said with some heat. "My daughter was ready to meet my wishes, Ser-

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geant McQuade. Mr. Ashton was a gentleman and was much attached to her. They met in China."

The detective said no more, but ordered the door locked as we passed out, and put the key in his pocket. I asked his permission to accompany him in his explorations outside, to which he readily consented, and, with a parting injunction to Major Temple to see that Li Min was not allowed to leave the house, we passed out into the gardens by a rear entrance.

The storm of the night before had completely passed away and the morning was crisp and clear, with a suggestion of frost in the air. The wind, which had not yet died down, had done much to dry up the rain, but the gravel walks were still somewhat soft and muddy. The rain however had stopped some time during the night, and as the tragedy had occurred later, and not long before daybreak, there was every reason to believe that traces of anyone ap-

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proaching the house beneath the windows of Mr. Ashton's room would be clearly visible. It was equally certain that any traces of steps made before or during the rain must have been thereby completely obliterated. The soft graveled path encircled the rear of the house and turned to the front at the end of each wing. We walked along it and presently found ourselves beneath the two windows upon the south wall, which opened from the green room. There were no evidences of anyone having walked upon the pathway since the rain, nor was it apparent that anyone could have gained access to the windows high above without the aid of a ladder, which, had one been used, must inevitably have left its telltale marks behind. Sergeant McQuade looked down, then up, grunted to himself and passed on. There was nothing of interest here. At the end of the pathway we came to the termination of the wing and I saw the detective look about keenly. Here certainly the condi-

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tions were more favorable. A covered porch encircled the end of the building and extended along its front. There were three windows in the west face of the wing, one in the room which I had occupied, one in the end of the hallway and one in Mr. Ashton's room. The roof of the porch was directly beneath them. How easy, I thought at once, for anyone inside the house to have reached the porch roof from the window at the end of the hall, and to have gained, in half a dozen steps, the window of Mr. Ashton's room. I thought of the handkerchief, of the footsteps I fancied I had heard during the night, and shuddered. Here again the Sergeant first examined the graveled walk with elaborate care, but, as before, with no immediate results. Presently, however, he stepped toward the front of the house. There, in the soft gravel, were the prints of a woman's feet, leading from the corner of the path to the front entrance. I bent down and examined them with curious eyes, then

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recoiled with a cry of dismay. The footprints lead in one direction only, and that was toward the front door. In a flash I realized what theory McQuade would at once construct in his mind. The murderer, reaching the porch roof from the hallway, and obtaining access to the murdered man's room through the window, upon escaping from the room to the roof, would be unable to again enter the house from the roof because of my presence in the hall. What more natural than to descend from the porch to the ground by means of the heavy vines growing about the stone pillar supporting the porch roof at the corner, and, after walking quickly along the path a few steps, reach and re-enter the house through the front door, and appear almost at once among the others who had gathered in the upper hall as soon as the tragedy was known? I remembered at once that Miss Temple had appeared in a loose dressing gown. Would she, then, have had time to throw off her

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dress so quickly, wet and muddy as it must have been, and to change her shoes for slippers? Where were these shoes, I wondered, if this train of reasoning was correct, and would their condition prove that she had been out of the house during the night? As these thoughts crowded tumultuously through my brain, I saw McQuade examining the heavy mass of ivy which grew at the corner of the porch with a puzzled expression. Following his glance, I realized that the theory had at least a temporary setback. The vine was not broken or torn in any way as would inevitably have been the case had anyone used it as a means of descent from the roof. But I myself observed, though I felt sure that McQuade did not, a lightning rod which extended from the roof of the wing, down to the porch roof, across it, and thence to the ground about midway along the west side of the porch, and, had anyone descended in this way, he would have walked along the

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border between the side of the porch and the path until he arrived at the corner. Here, however, he would have been obliged to step off the border and on to the gravel, owing to the heavy vine, mentioned above, growing at this point. His footsteps upon the grass would of course have left no mark. I did not call McQuade's attention to this at the time, but waited for his next move. It did not surprise me. He strode along the path at the front of the house to the steps leading to the large porch and porte-cochère at the front of the main building, tracing the muddy footprints up to the porch and upon its floor until they were no longer perceptible. He then entered the house and at once made for the upper hall in the west wing, I following him closely. His first move, as I expected, was to examine and open the window at the end of the hall, which, I was not surprised to find, was unfastened. His second was to step out upon the roof. No sooner

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had I joined him here than he crossed to the window of the green room and peered in. The interior of the room was clearly visible, but the window was tightly bolted within, and resisted all his efforts to open it. The Sergeant looked distinctly disappointed. He stepped to the corner of the roof, made a further examination of the vines, came back to the window and again tried to open it, then, with a low whistle, he pointed to a mark upon the white window sill which had at first escaped both his and my attention. It was the faint print of a hand — a bloody hand — small and delicate in structure, yet, mysterious as seemed to be all the clues in this weird case, it pointed, not outward from the room, as though made by someone leaving it, but inward, as by a person standing on the roof and resting his or her hand upon the window sill while attempting to open the window.

“What do you make of that, Sir?” inquired the detective.

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"It looks as though it had been made by someone entering instead of leaving the room," I replied. "It could not have been made by anyone leaving the room. No one would get out of a window that way."

"Except a woman," said McQuade dryly. "A man would swing his legs over the sill and drop to the roof. It's barely three feet. But a woman would sit upon the sill, turn on her stomach, rest her hands on the sill with her fingers pointing toward the room, and slide gently down until her feet touched the roof beneath." He smiled with a quiet look of triumph.

"The whole thing is impossible," I retorted, with some heat. "There's no sense in talking about how anyone may or may not have got out of the room, when the bolted window proves that no one got either in or out at all."

"Perhaps you think that poor devil in there killed himself," said the detective, grimly. "Somebody must have got in."

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There is only one explanation possible. The window was bolted after the murder."

"By the murdered man, I suppose," I retorted ironically, nettled by his previous remark.

"Not necessarily," he replied coldly, "but possibly by someone who desired to shield the murderer." He looked at me squarely, but I was able to meet his gaze without any misgivings. "I was the first person who entered the room," I said, earnestly, "and I am prepared to make oath that the window was bolted when I entered."

"Was the room dark?" he inquired.

"It was," I answered, not perceiving the drift of his remarks. "One of the servants brought a candle."

"Did you examine the windows at once?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"I knelt down and examined the body."

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"What was Major Temple doing?"

"I — I did not notice. I think he began to examine the things in Mr. Ashton's portmanteau."

"Then, Mr. Morgan, if, occupied as you were in the most natural duty of determining whether or not you could render any aid to Mr. Ashton, you did not notice Major Temple's movements, I fail to see how you are in a position to swear to anything regarding the condition of the window at the time you entered the room."

"Your suggestion is impossible, Sergeant McQuade. Had Major Temple bolted the window, I should certainly have noticed it. I realize fully the train of reasoning you are following and I am convinced that you are wrong."

The Sergeant smiled slightly. "I do not follow any one train of reasoning," he retorted, "nor do I intend to neglect any one. I want the truth, and I intend to have it." He left the roof hurriedly, and, enter-

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ing the house we descended to the library, where Major Temple sat awaiting the conclusion of our investigations.

"Well, Mr. Morgan," he inquired excitedly as we came in, "what have you discovered?"

I nodded toward the Sergeant. "Mr. McQuade can perhaps tell you," I replied.

"I can tell you more, Major Temple," said the detective, gravely, "if you will first let me have a few words with Miss Temple."

"With my daughter?" exclaimed the Major, evidently much surprised.

"Yes," answered the detective, with gravity.

"I'll go and get her," said the Major, rising excitedly.

"If you do not mind, Major Temple, I should much prefer to have you send one of the servants for her. I have a particular reason for desiring you to remain here."

I thought at first that Major Temple was going to resent this, but, although he flushed

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hotly, he evidently thought better of it, for he strode to a call bell and pressed it, then, facing the detective, exclaimed:

"I think you would do better to question Li Min."

"I do not intend to omit doing that, as well," replied McQuade, imperturbably.

We remained in uneasy silence until the maid, who had answered the bell, returned with Miss Temple, who, dismissing her at the door, faced us with a look upon her face of unfeigned surprise. She appeared pale and greatly agitated. I felt that she had not slept, and the dark circles under her eyes confirmed my belief. She looked about, saw our grave faces, then turned to her father. "You sent for me, Father?" she inquired, nervously.

"Sergeant McQuade here"—he indicated the detective whom Miss Temple recognized by a slight inclination of her head—"wishes to ask you a few questions."

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"Me?" Her voice had in it a note of alarm which was not lost upon the man from Scotland Yard, who regarded her with closest scrutiny.

"I'll not be long, Miss. I think you may be able to clear up a few points that at present I cannot quite understand."

"I'm afraid I cannot help you much," she said, gravely.

"Possibly more than you think, Miss. In the first place I understand that your father had promised your hand in marriage to Mr. Ashton."

Miss Temple favored me with a quick and bitter glance of reproach. I knew that she felt that this information had come from me.

"Yes," she replied, "that is true."

"Did you desire to marry him?"

The girl looked at her father in evident uncertainty.

"I — I — Why should I answer such a question?" She turned to the detective

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with scornful eyes. "It is purely my own affair, and of no consequence — now."

"That is true, Miss," replied the Sergeant, with deeper gravity. "Still, I do not see that the truth can do anyone any harm."

Miss Temple flushed and hesitated a moment, then turned upon her questioner with a look of anger. "I did not wish to marry Mr. Ashton," she cried. "I would rather have died, than have married him."

McQuade had made her lose her temper, for which I inwardly hated him. His next question left her cold with fear.

"When did you last see Mr. Ashton alive?" he demanded.

The girl hesitated, turned suddenly pale, then threw back her head with a look of proud determination. "I refuse to answer that question," she said defiantly.

Her father had been regarding her with amazed surprise. "Muriel," he said, in a trembling voice — "what do you mean? You left Mr. Ashton and myself in the din-

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ing-room at a little after nine." She made no reply.

Sergeant McQuade slowly took from his pocket the handkerchief he had found in Mr. Ashton's room, and, handing it to her, said simply: "Is this yours, Miss?"

Miss Temple took it, mechanically.

"Yes," she said.

"It was found beside the murdered man's body," said the detective as he took the handkerchief from her and replaced it in his pocket.

For a moment, I thought Miss Temple was going to faint, and I instinctively moved toward her. She recovered herself at once. "What are you aiming at?" she exclaimed. "Is it possible that you suppose *I* had anything to do with Mr. Ashton's death?"

"I have not said so, Miss. This handkerchief was found in Mr. Ashton's room. It is possible that he had it himself, that he kept it, as a souvenir of some former meeting, although in that case it would hardly

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have retained the strong scent of perfume which I notice upon it. But you might have dropped it at table—he may have picked it up that very night. It is for these reasons, Miss, that I asked you when you last saw Mr. Ashton alive, and you refuse to answer me. I desire only the truth, Miss Temple. I have no desire to accuse anyone unjustly. Tell us, if you can, how the handkerchief came in Mr. Ashton's room."

At these words, delivered in an earnest and convincing manner, I saw Miss Temple's face change. She felt that the detective was right, as indeed, did I, and I waited anxiously for her next words.

"I last saw Mr. Ashton," she answered, with a faint blush, "last night about midnight."

Her answer was as much of a surprise to me as it evidently was to both Major Temple and the detective.

"Muriel," exclaimed the former, in horrified tones.

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"I went to his room immediately after he retired," continued Miss Temple, with evident effort. "I wished to tell him something — something important — before the morning, when it might have been too late. I was afraid to stand in the hallway and talk to him through the open door for fear I should be seen. I went inside. I must have dropped the handkerchief at that time."

"Will you tell us what you wished to say to Mr. Ashton that you regarded as so important as to take you to his room at midnight?"

Again Miss Temple hesitated, then evidently decided to tell all. "I went to tell him," she said, gravely, "that, no matter what my father might promise him, I would refuse to marry him under any circumstances. I told him that, if he turned over the emerald to my father under any such promise, he would do so at his own risk. I begged him to release me from the engage-

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ment which my father had made, and to give me back a letter in which, at my father's demand, I had in a moment of weakness consented to it."

"And he refused?" asked the detective.

"He refused." Miss Temple bowed her head, and I saw from the tears in her eyes that her endurance and spirit under this cross-questioning were fast deserting her.

"Then what did you do?"

"I went back to my room."

"Did you retire?"

"No."

"Did you remove your clothing?"

"I did not. I threw myself upon the bed until—" She hesitated, and I suddenly saw the snare into which she had been lead. When she appeared in the hallway at the time of the murder she wore a long embroidered Chinese dressing gown. Yet she had just stated that she had not undressed. McQuade, who seemed to have the mind of a hawk, seized upon it at once.

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"Until what?" he asked bluntly.

"Until — this morning," she concluded, and I instinctively felt that she was not telling the truth.

"Until you heard the commotion in the hall?" inquired McQuade, insinuatingly. I felt that I could have strangled him where he stood, but I knew in my heart that he was only doing his duty.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then, Miss Temple, how do you explain the fact that you appeared immediately in the hall — as soon as the house was aroused — in your slippers and a dressing gown?"

She saw that she had been trapped, and still her presence of mind did not entirely desert her. "I had begun to change," she cried, nervously.

"Were you out of the house this morning, Miss Temple, at or about the time of the murder? Were you at the corner of the porch under Mr. Ashton's room?" The

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detective's manner was brutal in its cruel insistence.

Miss Temple gasped faintly, then looked at her father. Her eyes were filled with tears. "I — I refuse to answer any more questions," she cried, and, sobbing violently, turned and left the room.

McQuade strode quickly toward Major Temple, who had observed the scene in amazed and horrified silence. "Major Temple," he said, sternly, "much as I regret it, I am obliged to ask you to allow me to go at once to Miss Temple's room."

"To her room," gasped the Major.

"Yes. I will be but a moment. It is imperative that I make some investigations there immediately."

"Sir," thundered the Major, "do you mean for a moment to imply that my daughter had any hand in this business? By God, Sir — I warn you —" he towered over the detective, his face flushed, his clenched fist raised in anger.

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McQuade held up his hand. "Major Temple, the truth can harm no one who is innocent. Miss Temple has, I fear, not been entirely frank with me. It is my duty to search her room at once — and I trust that you will not attempt to interpose any obstacles to my doing so." He started toward the door, and Major Temple and I followed reluctantly enough. With a growl of suppressed rage the girl's father led the way to her room to which she had not herself returned. As though by instinct, the detective went to a large closet between the dressing-room and bedroom, threw it open, and after a search of but a few moments drew forth a pair of boots damp and covered with mud, and a brown tweed walking skirt, the lower edge of which was still damp and mud stained. He looked at the Major significantly. "Major Temple," he said, "your daughter left the house, in these shoes and this skirt, some time close to daybreak. The murder occurred about that time. If

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you will induce her to tell fully and frankly why she did so, and why she seems so anxious to conceal the fact, I am sure that it will spare her and all of us a great deal of annoyance and trouble, and assist us materially in arriving at the truth." As he concluded, sounds below announced the arrival of the police and the divisional surgeon from the town, and, with a curt nod, he left us and descended to the hall.

CHAPTER IV

I ADVISE MISS TEMPLE

I LEFT the room and went down to the main hall. The divisional surgeon, with McQuade and his men had already proceeded to the scene of the tragedy, and as I did not suppose that I would be wanted there, I left the house and started out across the beautiful lawns, now partially covered with the fallen leaves of oak and elm, my mind filled with conflicting thoughts and emotions. As I passed out, I met Miss Temple coming along the porch, wearing a long cloak, and evidently prepared for a walk, so I suggested, rather awkwardly, remembering her look of annoyance during the examination by Sergeant McQuade, that I should be happy to accompany her. Somewhat to my surprise she accepted

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my offer at once, and we started briskly off along the main driveway leading to the highroad. Miss Temple, of lithe and slender build, was, I soon found, an enthusiastic walker, and set the pace with a free and swinging stride that rejoiced my heart. I dislike walking with most women, whose short and halting steps make accompanying them but an irritation. I did not say anything as we walked along, except to comment upon the change of weather and the beauty of the day, for I felt sure that she would prefer to be left to her own thoughts after the trying ordeal through which she had just passed. She was silent all the way down to the entrance to the grounds, and seemed to feel oppressed by the house and its proximity, but as soon as we set out along the main road toward Pinhoe over which Ashton and I had traveled the evening before, she seemed to brighten up, and, turning to me, said, with surprising suddenness: "Do you believe, Mr. Morgan, that I had

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any part in this terrible affair? The questions the detective asked me indicated that he had."

"Certainly not," I said. "And, if you will permit me to say so, Miss Temple, I think you would have been wiser had you been entirely frank with him."

"What do you mean?" she asked, indignantly.

I felt disappointed, somehow, at her manner.

"Miss Temple," I said, gently, "you at first refused to admit that you had sought an interview with Mr. Ashton at midnight. I fully understood your reasons for your refusal. It was an unconventional thing to do, and you feared the misjudgment of persons at large, although to me it appeared, in the light of my knowledge of the case, a most natural action. Mr. Ashton still retained the jewel, and, if he gave it up after your warning, he could not have complained of the consequences. But I am

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sorry, Miss Temple, that you were not as frank about your leaving the house, as he believes you did, early this morning."

"Why does he believe that?" she asked, spiritedly.

"Because, in the first place, he found footprints — the footprints of a woman's shoe, in the gravel walk, from the west corner of the porch to the main entrance. They lead only one way. After questioning you, he searched your room, and found the skirt and shoes which you wore, both wet and covered with mud. The rain did not stop until three or four this morning. The footprints were made after the rain, or they would have been washed away and obliterated by it. For these reasons, he fully believes you were out of the house close to daybreak, which was the time of the murder."

"The brute," said Miss Temple, indignantly, "to enter my rooms!"

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"It is after all only his duty, Miss Temple," I replied.

"Well, perhaps you are right. But suppose I did go outside at that time — suppose I had decided to run away from Mr. Ashton, and my father, and their wretched conspiracy against my happiness, what guilt is there in that? I came back, did I not?"

"Why," I inquired, "did you come back?"

She glanced quickly at me, with a look of fear.

"I — I — that I refuse to explain to anyone. After all, Mr. Morgan, I certainly am not obliged to tell the police my very thoughts."

Her persistency in evading any explanation of her actions of the morning surprised and annoyed me. "You will remember, Miss Temple, that I said the footprints lead in one direction only, and that was toward the house. Mr. McQuade does not

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believe that you left the house in the same way that you returned to it.

"What on earth does he believe then?" she inquired with a slight laugh, which was the first sign of brightness I had seen in her since she left me with a smile the night before. I could not help admiring her beautiful mouth and her white, even teeth as she turned inquiringly to me. Yet my answer was such as to drive that smile from her face for a long time to come.

"He believes this, Miss Temple, or at least he thinks of it as a possibility: Whoever committed the murder reached the porch roof by means of the window at the end of the upper hall, and, after entering and leaving Mr. Ashton's room, descended in some way from the porch to the pathway, and re-entered the house by the main entrance. Your footsteps are the only ones so far that fit in with this theory."

"It is absurd!" said my companion, with a look of terror. "How could the

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window have been rebolted? Why should the murderer not have re-entered the house in the same way he left it? How does he know that there was anyone upon the roof at all? ”

“ In answer to the first objection, he claims that someone interested in the murderer’s welfare might have rebolted the window upon entering the room. That would of course mean either your father or myself. To the second, that whoever committed the crime feared to enter the hall by the window after the house had been aroused. To the third, there is positive evidence of the presence of someone having been upon the roof, at Mr. Ashton’s window.”

“ What evidence? ” She seemed greatly alarmed; her clenched hands and rapid breathing indicated some intense inward emotion.

“ The faint print of a hand — in blood, upon the window sill. With these things to

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face, Miss Temple, you will, I'm sure, see the advisability of explaining fully your departure from the house, and your return, in order that the investigations of the police may be turned in other directions, where the guilt lies, instead of in yours, where, I am sure, it does not." I fully expected, after telling her this, that she would insist upon returning to the house at once and clearing herself fully, but what was my amazement as I observed her pallor, her agitation, the nervous clenching of her hands, increase momentarily as I laid the Sergeant's theory before her! She seemed suddenly stricken with terror. "I can say nothing, nothing whatever," she answered, pathetically, her face a picture of anguish.

I felt alarmed, and indeed greatly disappointed at her manner. Limiting the crime to three persons, one of whom must have been upon the porch roof a little before daybreak, I saw at once that suspicion must inevitably fall upon either Miss Temple or

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her father. In the first instance — McQuade's theory that Miss Temple herself committed the gruesome deed seemed borne out by all the circumstances, but, if not, there could be but one plausible explanation of her unwillingness to speak: she must have seen the murderer upon the roof, and for that reason rushed back into the house. In this event, however, she would certainly have no desire to shield anyone but her father — and he, in turn might have re-entered the hallway through the window before I had thrown on my clothes and left my room after hearing the cry. He, also, to cover up his crime, had he indeed committed it, might have rebolted the window from within while I was examining the body of the murdered man, as McQuade had suggested. I remembered now that Major Temple had excluded everyone from the room but ourselves, and shut the door as soon as the murder was discovered. To suppose that Miss Temple was the guilty

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person was to me out of the question. Had she committed the crime, her father would necessarily have been an accomplice, otherwise he would not have bolted the window, and this seemed unbelievable to me. Yet there was the print of the bloody hand, upon the window sill — small, delicately formed, certainly not that of her father. My brain whirled. I could apparently arrive at nothing tangible, nothing logical. There yet remained the one possibility — the Chinaman, Li Min. His hands, small and delicate, might possibly have made the telltale print upon the window sill, but, in that event, why should Miss Temple hesitate to tell of it, had she seen him. The only possible solution filled me with horror. I could not for a moment believe it, yet it insisted upon forcing itself upon my mind: that Miss Temple and Li Min were acting together; that her father, too, was in the plot, as he must have been if he rebolted the window. The thing was clearly impos-

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sible, yet if not explained in this way, the Chinaman was clearly innocent, for I believed without question that, had he entered the room and committed the murder, he could in no possible way have bolted the window himself, from without, after leaving it. I walked along in silence, my mind confused, uncertain what to believe and what not, yet, as I looked at the strong, beautiful face of the girl beside me, I could not think that, whatever she might be lead to do for the sake of someone else, she could ever have committed such a crime herself. I also remembered suddenly Major Temple's angry remark, made to Robert Ashton as they stood in the hall after dinner the night before, that he would never allow Ashton to leave the house with the emerald in his possession. Was she shielding her father? Was it he, then, that she had seen upon the roof? We walked along for a time in silence, then, through some subtle intuition dropping the subject of the tragedy.

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completely, we fell to talking of my work, my life in London, and so began to feel more at ease with each other. By the time we had returned to the house, it was close to the luncheon hour, and as I went to my room, I met Sergeant McQuade, in the hall. From him I learned that the divisional surgeon had completed his examination and returned to the town, that the body had been removed to a large unused billiard-room on the ground floor, and that the inquest was set for the following morning at eleven. The detective also said, in response to a question from me, that the two Chinamen who had left Exeter on the morning train had been apprehended in London, upon their arrival, and were being held there pending his coming. He proposed to run up to town the next day, as soon as the inquest was over. A careful and detailed search of Mr. Ashton's room and belongings had failed to reveal either any further evidence tending to throw light upon the

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murder, or any traces of the missing emerald Buddha.

After luncheon, Sergeant McQuade asked Major Temple to meet him in the library, accompanied by Li Min, and at the Major's request I joined them. The Chinaman was stolidly indifferent and perfectly collected and calm. His wooden face, round and expressionless, betrayed no feeling or emotion of any nature whatsoever. I observed, as did the detective, that his right hand was bound up with a strip of white cloth. He spoke English brokenly, but seemed to understand quite well all that was said to him.

"Li Min," said Major Temple, addressing the man, "this gentleman wishes to ask you some questions." He indicated Sergeant McQuade.

"All right." The Chinaman faced McQuade with a look of bland inquiry.

"Where did you spend last night?" asked the detective suddenly.

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"Me spend him with blother at Exeter."

"Where, in Exeter?"

"Flog Stleet."

"What time did you leave this house?"

"P'laps 'leven o'clock, sometime."

"Was it raining?"

"Yes, velly much lain."

"You did not go to bed, then?"

"No, no go to bed, go Exeter."

The Sergeant looked at him sternly.

"Your bed was not made this morning.

You are lying to me."

"No, no lie. Bed not made ffrom day before. I make him myself."

The detective turned to Major Temple.

"Is this fellow telling the truth?" he asked.

"Does he make his own bed?"

"Yes," replied the Major. "The other servants refused to have anything to do with him. They are afraid to enter his room. He cares for it himself."

"What did you do in Exeter?" asked McQuade.

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"P'laps talkee some, smokee some, eatee some — play fantan — bimby sleep."

"What's the matter with your hand?" asked the detective suddenly.

"Me cuttee hand, bloken bottle — Ex-eter."

"What kind of a bottle?"

"Whiskey bottle," answered Li Min, with a childlike smile.

McQuade turned away with a gesture of impatience. "There's no use questioning this fellow any further," he growled. "He knows a great deal more about this affair than he lets on, but there's no way to get it out of him, short of the rack and thumb-screw. Do any of the other servants sleep near him? Perhaps they may know whether or not he left the house last night. Who attends to locking the house up?"

"I have always trusted Li Min," said Major Temple. "He sleeps in a small room on the third floor of the east wing, which has a back stairway to the ground

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floor. The other house servants sleep on the second floor of the rear extension, over the kitchen and pantries. My daughter generally sees to the locking up of the house."

"Did she do so last night?"

"No. I did so myself. I locked the rear entrance before I retired shortly before midnight."

"After Mr. Ashton had left you to retire?"

"Immediately after."

"Then, if Li Min had left the house by that time, you would not have known it?"

"No, I should not. I heard no sounds in the servants' quarters and presumed they had retired. I sat up with Mr. Ashton, discussing various matters until quite late — perhaps for two hours or more after dinner."

"You were alone?"

"Yes, both my daughter and Mr. Morgan had retired some time before."

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"Did you have any quarrel with Mr. Ashton before he left you?"

Major Temple glanced at me with a slight frown. "We had some words," he said, hesitating slightly, "but they were not of any serious consequence. We had a slight disagreement about the price he was to be paid for his services in procuring for me the emerald in addition to the other arrangement, of which I have already told you."

"And the matter was not settled before he left you?"

"No—" the Major hesitated perceptibly and seemed to be choosing his words with the utmost care—"it was not—but we agreed to leave it until the morning."

"You were displeased with Mr. Ashton, were you not? You quarreled violently?"

"I—we did not agree," stammered the Major.

"Did Mr. Ashton threaten to take the

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stone elsewhere, in case you would not agree to pay his price? ”

“ He mentioned something of the sort, I believe,” said the Major.

“ To which you objected strongly? ”

“ I protested, most certainly. I regarded the stone as my property. He acted as my agent only.”

McQuade remained silent for some moments, then turned to Major Temple.

“ Major Temple,” he said, “ I am obliged to go into the town for the remainder of the afternoon, but I shall be back here this evening. I shall leave one of my men on the premises. When I return, I should like very much to have you tell me the complete history of this jewel, this emerald Buddha, which has evidently been the cause of all this trouble. No doubt Mr. Ashton told you the story of his efforts to obtain it, while in China, and of the way in which he succeeded. Possibly, when we have a better understanding of what this jewel may mean

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to the real owners of it, we may the better understand how far they would go in their efforts to recover it.

"I shall be very happy indeed to do so," said Major Temple. "It is a most interesting and remarkable story, I can assure you."

After McQuade had gone, I strolled about the grounds for the larger part of the afternoon, trying to get my mind off the gloomy events which had filled it all the morning to the exclusion of everything else. I said to Major Temple before I left him that I regretted the necessity of remaining as an uninvited guest at his house pending the inquest, and suggested that I might remove myself and my belongings to Exeter, but he would not hear of it. I strolled into the town, however, later in the afternoon, after trying vainly to make some sketches, and dispatched a telegram to my mother, in Torquay, advising her that I would be delayed in joining her. On my way back I

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took a short cut over the fields, and found myself approaching The Oaks from the rear, through a bit of woodland, which through neglect had become filled with underbrush. The sun had already set, or else the gloom of the autumn afternoon obscured its later rays, for the wood was shadowy and dark, and as I emerged from it, near a line of hedge which separated it from the kitchen gardens of The Oaks, I observed two figures standing near a gateway in the hedge, talking together earnestly. I came upon them suddenly, and, as I did so, they separated and one of them disappeared swiftly into the shadows of the wood while the other advanced rapidly toward the house. I quickened my steps, and, as the figure ahead of me reached the higher ground in the rear of the house, I saw that it was Li Min. He appeared unconscious of my presence and vanished rapidly into the house. The circumstance filled me

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with vague suspicions, though I could not tell just why. Instinctively, as I approached the house, I turned toward the west wing, and, as I reached the rear corner of the building, I stepped back on the grass, beyond the gravel walk, to obtain a view of the windows above. As I moved backward over the turf, until I could reach a point where I could see over the edge of the porch roof, I suddenly tripped over an object in the grass and nearly fell. As I recovered myself, I looked to see what it was, and picked up a short, thick iron poker with a heavy octagonal brass knob at one end of it. As I held it in my hand, I realized at once that with such a weapon as this the strange wound in Ashton's head could readily have been made. I examined the pointed prismatic knob carefully, but, beyond being somewhat stained from lying in the wet grass, it showed no other marks of the gruesome use to which I instinctively felt it had

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been put. Wrapping it carefully in my handkerchief, I carried it to my room, and took the precaution to lock it safely in one of the drawers of the dresser, pending an opportunity to show it privately to Sergeant McQuade upon his return from Exeter.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR TEMPLE'S STORY

WE sat in the dimly lighted library after dinner, having been joined by Sergeant McQuade who returned from Exeter about nine. I had not seen Miss Temple alone, since dinner, as she had retired to her room as soon as our silent meal was over. The Major, after furnishing us with some excellent cigars, and some specially fine liqueur brandy, settled himself in his easy chair and proceeded to tell us of his experiences, and those of Robert Ashton, in the pursuit of the emerald Buddha. He seemed anxious to do this, to show to the detective the probability of the murder of Ashton having occurred in an attempt upon the part of some Chinese secret or religious society to recover the jewel.

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He showed no feeling of animosity toward the man from Scotland Yard whether he felt it or not, and had either concluded that the latter's sharp questioning of his daughter was justified by the curious and inexplicable circumstances which surrounded the tragedy, or else was desirous of covering up his own knowledge of the matter by assuming a manner at once frank and ingenuous.

"I spent almost all of last year," said the Major, "in traveling through the interior of China. I was for a long time stationed in India, and although I was placed upon the retired list nearly ten years ago, the spirit of the East has called me, its fascination has drawn me toward the rising sun, ever since. I had traveled extensively in India, Siam, Persia and even Japan, and was familiar with most of the Chinese cities upon and near the coast, but the interior was to me until last year almost a sealed book. My daughter and I arrived at

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Pekin early last spring, and, after spending nearly a month in that city, we began an extensive trip toward the West. I had made somewhat of a study of Chinese, while in India, having always been attracted by the art and history of that remarkable country, and during our stay in Peking, and later, while traveling inland, I managed to pick up enough of the local dialects to make myself understood. We traveled on horseback, and had a considerable retinue of native servants which we took along with us from Peking. The expedition was safe enough, barring the usual attempts of sneak thieves upon our stores, and while to persons not accustomed to traveling in such countries the journey would no doubt have been full of hardships, to us, familiar with such work, it was fairly comfortable. We paid good prices for what we bought en route, had no religious views to promulgate, and, by minding our own business strictly, we had no trouble with the natives of any

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serious moment. I had managed to pick up a few samples of old porcelain and one or two excellent ivories of great age and beauty, but, beyond these, the trip had not yielded much in the way of curios for my collection, when in June we reached the city of Ping Yang. We found this place peculiarly interesting to us, with a population noticeably different from the inhabitants of the seaport towns, and we remained there perhaps a month. I spent a good deal of time wandering about the town, looking at such examples of old bronzes, embroideries, curious bits of jewelry, etc., as I could find in the shops and bazaars, and I frequently had occasion to pass a small temple, maintained by the Buddhists in one of the lower quarters of the town. Not over half of the Chinese are Buddhists, as perhaps you may know, the number of devotees of that religion being considerably greater in the western and northwestern part of the empire, toward Thibet, from which country the

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religion originally passed into China. This temple, of which I speak, was a small one, but was notable because of the fact that a portion of the bone of the little finger of Buddha was preserved, or said to be preserved, among the relics of the shrine. I had frequently observed the priest, who had charge of the temple, sitting sunning himself outside its doorway as I passed, and on several occasions I had dropped some coins into his hand with a salutation which would be equivalent to our English good luck. One day when I was passing, I remarked to one of my servants who was with me and who understood English fairly well, that I was curious to see the interior of the shrine, and he, after a conversation with the temple priest, informed me that, if I wished it, there would be no objection to my doing so. I thereupon entered and found myself in a gloomy chamber dimly illuminated by several oil lamps hanging from the low ceiling. Around the walls of the room hung

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some wonderful embroideries, which represented, so the priest informed me, incidents in the life of Buddha. There were no seats, of course, and the floor was of hard-packed clay. At the center of the rear end of the room was a high wooden screen, elaborately carved, and lacquered in dull red and gold. Through an opening in this screen I perceived a large bronze figure of the Buddha, before which was arranged, upon the low altar, a profusion of flowers and food, offerings of the faithful to the deity. There were a number of small candles burning before the bronze figure, and behind and beyond it I saw a small room which evidently served as the living or sleeping chamber of the temple priest. After he had shown me everything in the room with much pride—he seemed a simple and earnest old fellow—I made ready to depart and, before doing so, drew from my pocket a handful of the brass coins, called cash, with which you are no doubt

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familiar, and thrust them into the old fellow's outstretched hands. He seemed deeply grateful and said a few words in his native tongue to my servant, who turned to me with the information that the priest was about to accord me an especial honor by showing me the sacred relic of the Buddha. He approached the altar, and, taking a key from his girdle, opened a small gold box covered with wonderful repoussé work, which stood directly in front of the sitting figure of the god, and rested between his knees. Upon opening this box, he drew forth a small ivory shrine, also elaborately carved, which he set upon the top of the first box, and arranged so that the light from the candles fell upon it. He then opened the ivory box with a small gold key, and I looked in. The relic of the Buddha, a small and insignificant looking piece of dirty brown bone, I paid slight attention to, for in that box, glistening and glowing with the most wonderful color in

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the light of the candles, stood the emerald Buddha. The relic lay upon a piece of white silk, at the bottom of the box. There was a shelf in the box, of ivory, half-way up its height, and upon this shelf, occupying the upper half of the ivory casket, stood the emerald, its brilliant color and marvelous workmanship rendered the more noticeable by the white background of the ivory. I inquired as to its history, through my servant, and was informed that it had been brought to Ping Yang many centuries before, by the priest who brought the relic from Thibet and founded the temple. He told me that it was an emerald, but neither the fact of its enormous size and value as a jewel nor its priceless beauty as an example of the most exquisite workmanship in the carving and cutting of gems that I had ever seen seemed to appeal to him. To him its value was solely of a religious nature: it was a statue of the great teacher, carved by some devoted worshiper or

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patient monk centuries before, and had always been venerated, next to the relic, as the most precious of all the temple's possessions. I told my servant to ask the priest if they would sell it, but he seemed disinclined to make the request until I repeated my injunction rather sharply. When the message had been translated to the old man, he scowled darkly, his face lighting up with a look of sullen anger, and, hastily locking his treasures in their double box, he turned without making any reply and began to usher us from the room. I repeated the request, this time using my own store of Chinese, and drew forth a large roll of gold, but the priest waved me aside with an angry word, which sounded like a curse, and pointed to the door. There was nothing left but to go, and I did so, though with the bitterest regret at leaving what I considered the most remarkable and unique of all the curios which I have ever seen in the whole course of my life and the one

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which I would have given most to possess. In the course of the next week I haunted the neighborhood of the temple, and several times, finding the old priest sitting beside the door, attempted to repeat my offer, but he invariably drew back with a look of intense hatred, and refused to listen to me. Upon my fourth or fifth attempt I found him in company with several other Chinamen, evidently members of his sect, who regarded me with dark looks and muttered imprecations, and the next time I appeared in the street I found myself surrounded by quite a mob of excited Chinamen who assailed me with fierce curses and cries, and even made as though to offer me personal violence. After this I felt that it would be unsafe for me to venture into that quarter of the town again, and a few days later, finding that even in other sections of the city I was regarded with evident suspicion and dislike, I decided to leave the place and return to Peking. We left Peking early in

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August, and, after stopping at several of the seaport cities, arrived early in October in Hong Kong where we made a stay of several weeks. It was here that I met Robert Ashton who, like myself, was traveling in China for the purpose of collecting rare examples of Chinese art, and who, I soon found, possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the subject. This knowledge, which is not common among us in the West, formed a bond of sympathy between us, especially in that country so remote from home, where the sight of an English face and the sound of one's native language are always so welcome. During our stay there we saw a great deal of Mr. Ashton, and he soon became very attentive to my daughter. She, like myself, has always felt a deep interest in Eastern art, and seemed rather to welcome Mr. Ashton's attentions, and I was gratified to think that in him I might find a son-in-law who would appreciate the collection, which has been my life work. I

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told him the story of my experiences in Ping Yang, in which he seemed deeply interested. He informed me that, although he had been in the city, he had never heard of the emerald Buddha. He intended going on to Peking later in the autumn, and proposed to me that he should attempt to secure the jewel for me. I told him that I regarded its purchase as impossible, but he only laughed and said that he felt sure he could secure it. I made light of his claims, and, when he said in all seriousness one night that he would obtain it for me provided I would consent to his marriage to my daughter, I agreed at once, both because I felt his quest was an absolutely hopeless one and because I saw no objections to him as a son-in-law in any event. I did not mention my agreement to my daughter at the time, not wishing it to appear to her that I was bartering her in return for a mere jewel. In fact I felt so certain that she would welcome Mr. Ashton's advances that

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I preferred that she should remain in ignorance of my compact with him. A few days later he departed for Peking, and we returned home by way of India and Suez. On account of both my daughter's health and my own, we decided to take a house on the southwest coast for a time, my house in London being under lease for a term of years, expiring this coming spring. Upon my return I questioned my daughter with relation to Mr. Ashton, and was amazed and horrified to learn that, far from regarding him with sentiments of esteem, she bore toward him a feeling almost of aversion. I explained to her the promise that I had made which it was now too late for me to recall, and at my earnest request and almost at my command she wrote to Mr. Ashton, agreeing to abide by my wishes in the matter. That was six or eight months ago, and I heard nothing from him until two days ago when he telegraphed me from Southampton that he had arrived in

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England and would come to see me at once.

“ His story, as he related it to me at dinner last night, was like an adventure from the Arabian Nights. After completing his business in Pekin, he had set out upon his long journey to Ping Yang with only a single native servant, a Chinaman from the south, a Confucian, who was devoted to him, and owed him a debt of gratitude for saving his life on one occasion. Accompanied only by this man, he penetrated slowly to within about fifteen miles of the city of Ping Yang, and there, in a small village, he lived for over a month, in an inconspicuous way. He spoke Chinese well, and, with the assistance of his servant, got hold of a dress such as is worn by the Buddhist pilgrim monks in China, who, casting aside the things of this world, spend their life in wandering about from shrine to shrine, living on the alms of the faithful and preaching the doctrines of their religion as they

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go. In this dress, with shaven head and staff in hand, he had arrived, alone, in Ping Yang one evening at dusk and at once proceeded to the temple, the location of which I had carefully described to him. Arriving at the door, with an offering of flowers, he entered, and, prostrating himself before the shrine, seemed lost in prayer. There were a number of other worshipers in the temple at the time, and still others came and went as the evening wore on, but Ashton continued in his place, muttering his prayers and pretending to be in great agony of spirit. Presently the hour grew late and one by one the worshipers departed, until only Ashton and the old temple priest were left. The latter, in some impatience, came up to him, and informed him that the hour was late and that he had better continue his devotions upon the morrow. Ashton pretended to be suffering from some sudden illness, and lay upon the floor moaning pitifully. As the old monk bent over

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him to see whether he could hear his muttered words, Ashton suddenly seized him by the throat, and with his powerful hands choked him into silence. He then gagged him with a piece of cloth which he had brought for the purpose, and, taking from his girdle the keys of the small shrine, proceeded to quickly open it and abstract the coveted emerald Buddha. Escape was easy. The old priest, unable to utter a sound would be unable to give the alarm until the next morning, and by that time Ashton, who had left his servant with their horses at a retired spot outside the town, would be miles away, journeying peaceably toward Peking as an English traveler. His escape, however, was not to be so easily effected. Whether the old priest penetrated his disguise as he sprang upon him, or whether the uproar into which the town was thrown reached the house at which the disguise had been assumed, he of course never knew, but it is certain that, after progressing toward

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Pekin for two days, they became aware that they were being followed by a numerous party of Chinese upon horseback, armed with pikes, bows and arrows, and some muskets. They got wind of the pursuing party before they themselves were seen, and, swerving from the main road, abandoned their horses in a lonely bit of wood, and while Ashton hid in the underbrush, his servant, after waiting until their pursuers had passed, went out and procured at a near-by village a set of Chinese clothing similar to his own, which Ashton donned after burying his own belongings in a swampy pond in the wood. From here on his adventures were exciting and varied, but as they progressed in a southeasterly direction they got beyond the zone which had been affected by the robbery of the temple, and at last succeeded in reaching the coast. From here they went north to Pekin, where the pseudo-Chinamen disappeared one night into the house where Ashton maintained

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his headquarters while in Peking, and the next morning Ashton appeared in European clothing, and began making arrangements to leave for his long trip to England. The rest of the story you know. He arrived here last night, and this morning he was found murdered and the emerald Buddha has disappeared. God knows what influences have been at work in his taking off. As for me, I know no more about it than you do."

As Major Temple concluded his story, he gazed at Sergeant McQuade and myself in turn, then passed his hand nervously over his forehead, as though the strain of the tragedy had begun to tell upon him severely.

McQuade rose, and I did likewise, and, bidding the Major good-night we left the room, leaving him sitting dejectedly enough, I thought, in his easy chair, patting the head of his great mastiff, Boris. It was past midnight when I left McQuade at the

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foot of the staircase, and, in spite of all the excitement of the day, I found myself so worn out that I was asleep almost as soon as I had placed my head upon the pillow.

CHAPTER VI

THE ORIENTAL PERFUME

THE inquest into Robert Ashton's strange death, which was held the following day in the billiard-room at The Oaks, was a brief affair. A jury had been impaneled in the town, and Major Temple, Miss Temple and myself, as well as Li Min and the other servants, were duly examined and we told our respective stories as we had already told them to Sergeant McQuade. No new light was thrown upon the affair by our testimony. Miss Temple, when questioned, admitted that she had left the house early in the morning, with the intention of running away, but had changed her mind suddenly and returned. Beyond this nothing could be got out of her. The divisional surgeon testified that his examina-

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tion of the deceased showed a simple fracture of the skull, not necessarily sufficient to produce death, although capable of doing so when combined with nervous shock or a weakened condition of the heart. That one or both of the latter agencies had combined with the result of the blow was evidenced by Ashton's almost instantaneous death and the look of horror which was upon his face. There was nothing for the jury to do but render a verdict stating that Robert Ashton had come to his death through a blow upon the head, delivered with some sharp instrument by a person or persons unknown. Said verdict having accordingly been rendered, and the body removed to an undertaking establishment in Exeter, there seemed nothing further for me to do but pack up my few belongings and go my way, knowing no more of the cause of Robert Ashton's death than before. I knew that Sergeant McQuade was working eagerly upon the case, and I felt

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sure that, if the discovery of the murderer were possible, he would accomplish it, but I had very grave doubts as to his success. I spoke a few words to him at the close of the inquest, and he informed me that he intended going up to London early that afternoon to interrogate the two Chinamen detained there since the preceding day, and, upon my volunteering to accompany him, he evinced no objection, but on the contrary seemed rather to welcome my suggestion. I knew perfectly well that, until the mystery was solved, not only myself, but Major and Miss Temple and Li Min, as well as the other servants in the house would all be more or less under police surveillance, and my sudden determination to go up to London arose from a feeling that I wanted if possible to stay with this case to the end — a feeling that became intensified whenever I thought of Muriel Temple and the unfortunate position in which this affair had placed her. Her exquisitely lovely

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face, drawn with suffering, appeared to me constantly, as she had looked at the coroner's inquest, and I felt with all my heart that, if I could do anything to help her, I would, cost what it might. I had no very clear idea as to just what I could accomplish by going up to London, but I felt sure that I should be more likely to find opportunities for helping her there, with the detective, than would be the case should I continue my walking trip to Torquay.

I hastened to my room, therefore, intending to pack my belongings before luncheon, so as to be ready for a start as soon thereafter as the detective was ready. I left the door of my room partially open upon entering, and for a time busied myself in arranging my luggage. As I did so, I thought I heard a slight sound in the green room across the hall—the one in which the tragedy had occurred—and, glancing up, saw that, by looking into the mirror of my dresser, I could see most of the interior of

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the room opposite. The room was not empty—for in a moment I observed Li Min, the Chinese servant, engaged apparently in arranging it, now that its unfortunate occupant and his belongings had been removed. His actions struck me as being decidedly peculiar, and I watched him carefully as he moved about. He was evidently searching for something, and examined with the most minute care every object in the room—the carpet, the pictures, the furniture, even the wall paper, as though looking for some place of concealment. I tried to figure this out to myself, but I could see no reasonable explanation of his conduct. If he, or any of his confederates had killed Ashton, they certainly must have secured the emerald Buddha, and taken it with them—the empty case, I remembered, lay upon the table. What then, could this Chinaman be searching for with such evident eagerness and anxiety? I determined to surprise him, and with a few

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rapid steps crossed the intervening hall and appeared in the doorway. He at once seemed confused, and made a quick pretense of being busily occupied in the business of setting the room to rights. I stood looking at him questioningly for a few moments, when I presently became aware of a curiously pungent, yet sweet, aromatic odor, which had something vaguely familiar to me about it. I could not, at first, place this perfume, which was noticeably different from those of our own country, when suddenly it flashed into my mind that this was the curious scent which I had noticed upon Miss Temple's handkerchief — the one dropped by her in Ashton's room on the occasion of her visit to him shortly before midnight on the evening preceding the tragedy. I glanced about, thinking to discover the source of this perfume, but for a time had difficulty in doing so. At last, however, I found that it came from a small cake of soap, of a dull-green color, which

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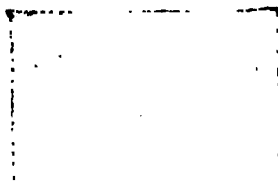
lay upon the washstand where it had evidently been left by Ashton. I picked up the soap and examined it, and at once recognized the pungent odor of which I have spoken. The coincidence struck me as being queer — the presence of this same perfume upon Miss Temple's handkerchief — and I was at a loss to account for it. I picked up the cake of soap, observing its perfume closely, then, noticing that the Chinaman was regarding me with a particularly malevolent gaze, I retired to my room, taking the soap with me. I had no definite purpose in this except to keep it in order to identify the perfume, and, upon returning to my room threw it into my satchel and completed the arrangements for my departure.

I was soon ready to go, and, after leaving my bag with one of McQuade's men, who was to accompany us to the railway station, I sought Miss Temple in the hope of saying good-by to her before my departure.



"I HAVE COME TO SAY GOOD-BY," I SAID.

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I was lucky enough to find her in the library, sewing, and looking unusually pale and distressed. She greeted me with rising color, and I confess that I, too, felt a trifle of embarrassment. I could not forget her agitation of the day before when I had questioned her as to her movements upon the morning of the tragedy and her flat refusal to continue the conversation when I had pressed her to explain her reasons for her early morning expedition as well as her sudden return. I stood gazing at her in perplexity, but, as I did so, the beauty of her face, the clear, honest expression of her eyes once more convinced me that whatever were her reasons for silence they did not in any way implicate *her* in this tangled affair.

“I have come to say good-by,” I said.

“Oh, are you going — I did not know.” She half rose; her face filled with lively concern.

“I’m afraid I’ve already overstayed my

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time," I replied. "After all, Miss Temple, I came as a stranger and must thank you and your father for making me as welcome as you have under the existing painful circumstances."

"I have not thought of you as a stranger, Mr. Morgan," she answered simply. "You have been a great help during this trying ordeal, and I am sorry that you must go—very sorry." There was a ring of sincerity in her voice that thrilled me; my heart gave a leap, and, as I met her eyes, I realized all of a sudden that, go where I might, I could not yet go very far away from Muriel Temple. "I do not go because I desire it," I replied, in a voice from which I could not eliminate the depth and intensity of my feelings. "I am no longer needed here, and it is in the hope that I may perhaps be of some service to you in London that I have asked Sergeant McQuade's permission to accompany him there to-day. I have taken the deepest interest

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in this terrible affair, Miss Temple, and, if it lies in my power, I intend to find the solution of it. My reward, if I can do so, will be the knowledge that I have served you."

"You are very good, Mr. Morgan. I shall never forget it, never." She rose and placed her hand in mine, and allowed it to remain there for a moment — a moment which seemed far too short to me, since I had suddenly realized that I should be madly happy could I know that I would have the right to keep it there always. "And, when you have good news, you will come to The Oaks and tell us about it, will you not?" she concluded, with a smile that went to my heart.

"Indeed I shall, Miss Temple — you may be sure of that — and I hope it may be soon."

"So do I," she said, and I turned to leave her. Then I suddenly bethought myself of the strange Oriental perfume that had

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clung so strongly to the handkerchief which the detective had found in the green room. I turned to her once more. "Miss Temple," I said, with some hesitation, "you will pardon me, I know, but you may remember that the handkerchief which was found in Mr. Ashton's room upon the morning of the — the tragedy, and which you thought you might have dropped there, was strongly scented with a powerful Oriental perfume. May I ask what that perfume is, and where you procured it?"

"Perfume?" she ejaculated, in surprise. "Why, Mr. Morgan, I never use any — never."

"You never use any?" I stammered. "But it was upon your handkerchief. I thought that perhaps you might have gotten it during your travels in China."

"The handkerchief was mine, Mr. Morgan — that is true. But of the perfume I know absolutely nothing. Why do you ask?"

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I hardly knew what reply to make. The whole affair seemed absurdly trivial; the identity of the perfume of the soap, and of the handkerchief meant nothing, pointed to nothing, and yet I could not shake off the idea that there was some intimate connection between the perfume of the handkerchief and that of the soap which would go far toward solving the mystery of Robert Ashton's death. I bade her good-by with some simple explanation of my question, and hurried out to find McQuade. I understood that he intended going in to Exeter before luncheon, getting a bite to eat there, and taking the early afternoon express for London. I found him with one of his men upon the porch roof, busily engaged in making photographs of the bloody hand print upon the window sill of the green room. He came down presently and joined me.

"Is it not a curious fact, Mr. Morgan," he remarked, as he reached the foot of the

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short ladder he had used to ascend to the roof, "that, although Li Min had not only the motive for the murder, namely, the securing of the emerald Buddha, but also the opportunity, inasmuch as he could readily have reached the porch roof from within the house by means of the hall window, and while the hand print which I have been photographing is small and delicate, like that of a woman, or indeed like that of Li Min himself, yet I have tested every possible human means whereby the windows and doors of that room could have been bolted after the crime was committed, and I can see no possible way in which it could have been done, unless either Major Temple or yourself did it upon entering the room, which you certainly would neither of you have any reason to do were Li Min the guilty person? In spite of many of the peculiarities of Miss Temple's conduct, in spite of Major Temple's altercation with Mr. Ashton, I have been prepared to be-

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lieve all along that Li Min was on this roof at or near daybreak yesterday morning and I do not mind telling you that I have discovered certain evidence — evidence which had before escaped me, that to my mind proves it conclusively — yet how he could have entered that room, murdered Mr. Ashton, secured the jewel, climbed out of the window and shut and bolted it behind him on the inside is beyond my comprehension. It is not humanly possible — it simply cannot be.” He shook his head and looked at me in a state of evident perplexity.

I felt unable to offer any suggestions of value, but I hazarded a question. “Have you searched the attic above the room?” I asked.

“Thoroughly,” he replied. “The rafters have never been floored over. The lath and plaster of the ceiling are absolutely unbroken. As for the four walls, two of them are exterior walls, without openings, except the windows. One is the solid parti-

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tion between the room and the hallway. The fourth is equally solid, and of brick, between the green room and a large closet adjoining it to the east, which has evidently been used as a sort of lumber room, and contains a collection of old furniture, carpets, etc., covered with dust half an inch deep. The dust-covered floor and the rusty lock both show that it has not been entered for a long time. The furniture belongs to the owners of the property, and was evidently placed there years ago when the property was offered for leasing."

"Then it would seem that we have exhausted all possible clues," I observed. I did not think it worth while to take him into my confidence regarding Li Min, or the perfumed soap; and the brass-headed poker which I had found, and which I had placed in the drawer in my room, I had for the moment completely forgotten.

"So it seems," he remarked, thoughtfully. "This is by long odds the strangest

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case I have ever worked on. Possibly the two Chinamen we have in London may be able to throw some light upon it."

As we rounded the corner of the house, on our way to the front door, we suddenly saw Li Min dart out of the main entrance, closely pursued by the officer to whom I had entrusted my luggage. The Chinaman carried in his hand my Gladstone bag, and was running with incredible swiftness toward the road. Before I had time to make a move, McQuade darted forward and intercepted him, knocking from his hand with lightning-like quickness a long knife which he drew from his blouse. The two of them tumbled over upon the turf, McQuade rising first with my satchel in his hand. He looked at it, and seeing my name upon it handed it to me with a grim smile. "You must have a valuable kit here, Sir," he said, "or else this fellow has taken leave of his senses." He nodded to his assistant, who promptly stepped forward and snapped a

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pair of handcuffs upon the sullen-looking Oriental.

"The whole outfit isn't worth five pounds," I said, laughing, and picked up the satchel. As I did so the catch came open and my small collection of flannel shirts, toilet articles, sketching materials, etc., tumbled upon the grass. McQuade joined in my laugh, and assisted me in replacing my effects. "Nothing much here, Sir," he said, but I did not fail to notice that he observed each article closely as we re-packed the satchel.

We drove back to town in the high cart, with one of Major Temple's grooms at the reins beside me, and Li Min and the Sergeant upon the rear seat. After depositing the Chinaman at the jail, we took a hurried lunch at the Half Moon, and left for London on the early afternoon express, arriving at Waterloo station about dusk. I gave McQuade the address of my lodgings and studio in Tottenham Court Road, and, as

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he intended reporting at once at Scotland Yard, I left him with the understanding that, if anything significant developed during his examination of the two Chinamen, he would advise me and call upon me if I could assist him in any way. I realized of course that I was purely an outsider, and in no position to expect the police to take me into their confidence, but on the other hand I was not only the most important witness in the case, but my keen interest in the solution of the mystery, for the purpose of clearing the names of both Miss Temple and her father from any vestige of suspicion, was not lost upon the Sergeant, and I think he realized that I might be of considerable assistance to him should the case take some unexpected turn. He hurried off in a hansom and I followed, stopping on my way at the Vienna Café for dinner. It was past eight when I arrived at my studio, and, throwing my bag into a corner I sat down and wrote a letter to my mother at Tor-

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quay, explaining to her my change of plans, although making no mention of the reasons which caused the change. I must have been unusually tired, owing to my early rise and the varied excitements of the day, for I dozed in my chair, and was not aroused until after eleven, when I heard a loud knock at the studio door. I sprang up, somewhat confused, and, opening the door, found under it an envelope containing a note, written on plain, rather cheap paper, in a somewhat irregular but legible hand. It was from McQuade, and requested me to meet him at once at Number 30, Kingsgate Street. There was nothing else in the note, so without further delay I threw on a warm coat and soft hat, and, hurrying to the street, summoned a cab. The driver looked a bit surprised at the address, and asked me to repeat it, which I did a bit sharply, then threw myself into the rear seat and lighted a cigarette. Events were moving quickly it seemed. McQuade, I

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felt sure would not have sent for me at this hour of the night unless some developments of importance had occurred. I rejoiced in the hope that the examination of the two Exeter Chinamen had resulted in the discovery of both the missing jewel and the murderer, and thought with pleasure of the expedition I should make on the morrow to The Oaks and the happy tidings I should bring to Muriel. I had thought of her so continuously, since leaving there, and felt so keenly the loss of her companionship, slight as it had so far been, that I knew that hereafter all roads, for me, would lead to Exeter until the day came when I might lead her from it as my wife. It was while occupied in these dreams that I felt my cab draw up alongside the curb, just as the hour of midnight was striking from Old St. Paul's. I dismissed my man with a shilling for his pains, and ascended the steps of Number 30.

The house was an old one, and its ex-

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terior was gloomy and forbidding. Not a light shone in its closely shuttered windows, and only over the transom of the door was there any visible sign of occupants within. Here a faintly burning oil lamp shone behind a cobwebby glass, with the number of the house painted upon it in black. The whole atmosphere of the place was depressing in the extreme, and I pulled the bell with feelings of inward trepidation. Without, all was silent and deserted, and the starless sky and the sighing of wind through the gloomy streets, from which my cab had long since departed, but added to my presentiments of evil. I had heard the faint jangle of a bell in the interior of the house when I pulled the knob, but so long an interval elapsed before any response came that I was on the point of ringing it again, when I suddenly heard soft footsteps in the hallway, and the door was silently opened. I stepped within, mechanically, unable to observe the person who had admitted me, ow-

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ing to the fact that he or she, I knew not which, stood partially behind the door as it swung open and was therefore concealed by it. I had taken but a single step into the passage, when the door was swiftly closed behind me, and at the same instant a bag of heavy cloth was thrust over my head, and my arms were pinioned from behind in a vise-like grip. I attempted an outcry, and struggled violently, but the bag was drawn closely about my throat by a noose in the edge of it, and I felt myself being slowly, but surely, strangled.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE TEMPLE OF BUDDHA

IT was but a few moments after midnight, when I entered the house in Kingsgate Street, and it must have been nearly or quite an hour before I finally removed the bag from my head and realized the nature of my surroundings. Immediately after the attack upon me, I was lifted bodily by two or three silent figures, and carried a considerable distance, part of the way down a steep flight of stairs, and through what from its damp and musty smell might have been a tunnel or cellar. Presently I heard the opening of a heavy door, and in a moment I was thrown roughly upon a bench, and my pockets were systematically searched. My captors evidently were not looking for money for the only things they took from me

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were my keys. After this they left me, huddled up in a corner of the bench, afraid to cry out or make a move in any direction.

The room in which I now found myself was as silent as the tomb, and yet, from some subtle instinct, I felt that it was lighted brightly, and that there were others in it besides myself. I could feel that it was warm, and through the folds of the bag about my head came the acrid, half-sweet smell of opium or Chinese incense, or both. I realized at once that I was in the hands of some of Li Min's friends, and no doubt the note which purported to come from McQuade had been merely a decoy. How, I wondered, did they know my address? Possibly they had followed my cab from the station. I recollected now with vividness the interview I had witnessed, the afternoon before, between Li Min and some fellow countryman of his at the gateway in the hedge back of The Oaks. No doubt the crafty Oriental had in some way kept his

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confederates in London fully posted as to both my movements and those of Sergeant McQuade. What on earth they could want with me I was unable to imagine. I reached out softly with my right hand — I had not been bound — and touched a wall, hung with heavy embroidered satin. The bench upon which I sat was of hard polished wood. I reached up quickly, loosed the cord which held the bag tightly about my neck, and, with a swift motion, lifted it from my head.

The sight I beheld astounded me. I was in a long, low room, the bench upon which I sat being at the extreme end of it. The walls were hung from end to end with bright-colored satin, wonderfully embroidered with birds, flowers, dragons and strange Chinese characters. The floor was of wood, dark, and polished with the walking of many soft-shod feet. Facing me at the far end of the room was a great red-and-gold wooden screen, carved and lacquered, and

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representing some mysterious Chinese figures, whether gods or demons I could not tell. In the center of this screen was an opening, a sort of altar, brightly lighted by a large number of wax candles within which hung a representation of the god Buddha, marvelously embroidered upon dull red satin, with gold and silver threads. Behind the candles stood a small gold casket, or shrine, the door of which was standing open, disclosing an empty interior. The altar in front of the candles was covered with a profusion of dishes containing flowers, rice and other foods. Before the altar knelt a tall, gaunt figure, his back turned toward me, bowed in prayer. He wore a long, dark-brown robe, girdled loosely about the waist with a leather belt, and his gray hair was confined in a long queue which hung below his waist. He took no notice whatever of my movements, and remained in silent contemplation of the picture of the god before him. A number

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of sticks of incense were burning in a brass jar upon the altar, and the room was filled with a thin, waving blue haze, which circled softly around the great painted silk lanterns which hung from the ceiling. I felt as though I had been suddenly and mysteriously transported from a dark and gloomy London street to some wonderful temple in the far-off city of Peking. I rubbed my eyes, and moved uneasily upon my hard bench, but no movement upon the part of the silent worshiper indicated that he so much as knew of my presence.

I endured the tension of the situation for several minutes in silence, and had about made up my mind to speak to the kneeling figure before me, when suddenly a door at my left was opened, and I observed two dark and forbidding-looking Chinamen enter, carrying between them a limp and apparently lifeless figure, which they placed upon the bench beside me. The figure was that of a man, and he was not blindfolded as

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I had been, and, as I bent over and glanced at his bloodless face, I recoiled, sick and trembling. It was Sergeant McQuade.

The Chinamen paid no attention to me, and quietly withdrew. I placed my hand upon the detective's heart, and was overjoyed to find that it still beat. I dragged him to a sitting position, and shook him, hoping to arouse him from his lethargy. In a few moments I saw his eyes slowly open, and he clutched feebly at his throat. I followed his movements and found a heavy cord about his neck, so tightly drawn as almost to prevent him from breathing. This I quickly removed, and in a few moments he was able to speak. His first words, after a glance of intense surprise at our surroundings, were to ask me why I had sent for him. I told him that I had not done so.

"But you sent me a note, asking me to come to this address at once, that you had important news. I have two men outside,

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but these devils got me before I could blow my whistle. Not much use to try it now," he observed, looking about grimly.

"I sent you no note," I replied. "On the contrary, I got one from you. That is why I am here."

"We are both nicely trapped, it seems," he growled. "I wonder what these fellows are up to. They have searched me, but they took nothing, so far as I can see. I can't figure the thing out at all. What have you learned — anything?" He turned to me with a quick look of interrogation.

"Nothing. They took my bunch of keys, and left me here about an hour ago. I am as much in the dark as you are."

"Your keys," he muttered, softly; "your keys. What could they have wanted with them?" He seemed lost in thought.

Our further conversation was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door on our left. Some score or more of Chinamen crowded in, and were at once joined by the

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figure of the priest, who rose to his feet and advanced toward the center of the room. He was a terrible-looking old man, his face drawn and leathery, his eyes like burning coals, his mouth cruel and thin-lipped. All the others seemed to pay him deep respect. One of their number advanced and handed him a large object which he eagerly grasped. It was my Gladstone bag. McQuade and I glanced at each other in sudden comprehension. "It's my bag," I whispered to him. Now I knew at least why they had taken from me my keys.

The old priest placed the bag upon the floor and, kneeling beside it, proceeded to open it with eager, trembling hands. The others crowded about, every face tense and full of expectation. The kneeling figure proceeded slowly to remove and examine every article of clothing, throwing each one impatiently aside as he apparently failed to find that for which he sought. Presently his eye fell upon the small, green

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cake of soap which I had thrown loosely into the bag upon my departure from The Oaks. He seized it with a cry of triumph, and, taking a knife from his girdle, proceeded with extreme care to cut the cake of soap in two. The crowding figures about him hung upon his movements with intense anxiety. The room was as silent as death. I heard McQuade's muffled breathing as he watched the old man's every move, but I could see from the expression of his face that the scene meant no more to him than it did to me. Suddenly, with a loud cry, the priest broke the cake of soap in two, and there, within it, in a cavity about two inches long, lay the lost emerald Buddha, its wonderful color flashing and glowing in the light from the lantern above. I was absolutely dumb with amazement. Undeniably there before me lay the cause of Mr. Ashton's death, yet how it came to be in that cake of soap, and what light its presence there threw upon the manner of his sudden

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and tragic end, was beyond my comprehension. At least, however, I understood why Li Min had tried to make away with my satchel, but the fact that the presence of the jewel among my belongings might cause suspicion to point in my direction did not for the moment occur to me. It evidently did, however, to McQuade, as I before long had reason to know.

The kneeling priest rose to his feet with a glad cry, and, holding the image reverently in the hollow of his two hands, advanced toward the altar, the others crowding closely about him. Arrived at the shrine, he placed the figure carefully upon its pedestal within the golden casket, and, as the light of many candles fell full upon it, the whole crowd knelt down and began a weird sing-song prayer, that must have been a chant of joy, or some service of purification, now that their long-lost deity had been returned to them. Presently the strange sounds died away, and the various China-

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men placed offerings of fruit, flowers and food upon the altar. At length the priest rose, and faced us. The service was over. I had a feeling that our turn was now to come.

The tall, gaunt figure came close to us, and examined both our faces minutely. I fancy he was the same priest that Ashton had all but done for in Ping Yang, and, from his look of intense hatred and ferocity, I feel sure that, had he recognized McQuade or myself as either his assailant, or Major Temple, our moments in this life would have been numbered. He must of course have heard of Ashton's death, but no doubt he wanted to make sure that Ashton was actually the man who had so nearly strangled him. After completing his scrutiny of our far from happy faces, he drew back, and in answer apparently to the questions of his followers shook his head vigorously. Then ensued a heated altercation between himself and part of the Chinamen on the one hand

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and the remainder of the crowd on the other, the subject of which, I could plainly see, was the fate of the detective and myself. At last they all turned back to the altar, and the priest took from it two pieces of wood, slightly curved, some four or five inches long, and shaped not unlike the half of a banana, if it were cut in two lengthwise: that is, round on one side and flat upon the other. I saw that they were the Chinese luck sticks, which the petitioner casts before the altar, wishing as he does so, for that prayer which he desires the god to grant him. If the sticks fall with the flat sides of both upward, he is lucky — his prayer is granted; if with the flat sides of both downward, his prayer is refused. If one stick falls each way, there is no decision and the trial is made again. As the priest took up these sticks from the altar, a gleam of comprehension passed over the faces of the crowd about him. Several of their number sprang forward and, seizing us by

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the arms, dragged us before the altar. It was evidently their intention to leave the matter of our fate in the hands of the Buddha, and, as I glanced at the peaceful and beneficent face of the image before me, I wondered whether he, or blind luck, would control our destinies.

McQuade they took first. He was led directly in front of the altar, and the two sticks, placed with the flat sides, together, were put into his hands. He was then directed, by signs and a few muttered English words, to cast them upon the slab before the altar. He did so, not in the least understanding, I felt sure, what it was all about, and in a moment the hardwood sticks clattered before the altar. I leaned forward anxiously and looked at them. The flat sides of both were upward. McQuade was safe. The Chinamen thrust him aside angrily, and bent upon me their angry glances. I was pushed forward by many hands, and the luck sticks forced into my

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unwilling fingers. I had never thought much about death, and now it approached me in all its grisly terrors. McQuade had been spared my agony, for I felt sure he did not know the meaning of the ceremony through which he had just passed. He had thrown dice with death, and won, and yet he did not know it. But, to me, the trial came in all its horrible reality. I knew that upon the fall of those bits of wood depended my life, that within a few seconds of time I would either be free, or condemned to die by one of those unspeakably horrible means that only the Chinese understand and delight in. Their deity had been profaned and they wanted a victim, and, if his down-turned thumb claimed me as a sacrifice, I knew that no power on earth could save me. I shook with nervous dread — not so much through fear of death itself as of the manner of dying. My hands trembled; I could scarcely keep the sticks from falling to the floor. Presently I

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pulled myself together and determined to put a brave face upon the matter. The Chinamen about me were evidently enjoying my sufferings keenly as I could see from the diabolic grins upon their dark faces. I threw the sticks from me with a quick nervous movement, and then almost feared to look upon them. At last I did so, and what I saw was almost as bad as what I feared to see. Instead of the two flat sides of the sticks being uppermost, they lay one each way, and I was forced to throw again. The Chinese were evidently delighted. Any method of torture which is prolonged seems to please them beyond measure. I have heard that one of the most terrible they have invented is that of keeping a prisoner awake. For days and days sleep is prevented — the victim ultimately goes raving mad.

I determined to end the matter at once. My nerves were too much shaken to prolong the agony. I cast the sticks again

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upon the altar slab and bent over them with a prayer to God. One stick fell at once with its flat side uppermost. The other rolled over and over until it rested almost at the Buddha's feet. At last it trembled, half turned over, then stopped. It, like the other, gave the favorable sign. I was saved. In the sudden relief from the nervous tension I almost fell, but the Chinamen, cheated of their revenge, gave me no time for any such exhibitions of emotion. McQuade and I were seized, and in a few moments our arms were tightly bound behind us, and heavy bags similar to the one I had worn were placed over our heads. We were then roughly hurried through a series of rooms, once crossing what seemed to be a brick-paved court, which was undoubtedly in the open air, from the sudden change of temperature I experienced; then for an interminable distance through what seemed to be dark, narrow lanes and muddy streets, until at last our hoods were removed,

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our feet bound, and we were thrown into a narrow area way, some cotton waste being jammed into each of our mouths to prevent our making any outcry. Here we were discovered at daybreak, some four or five hours later, nearly frozen to death, by a watchman, who released us from our bonds and, upon hearing from Sergeant McQuade who he was, hastened to find us a cab.

Our first step after it came was to drive to the nearest public house and get each a steaming drink of hot brandy, after which we ate a hasty breakfast. The detective, who seemed thoughtful and little inclined to talk, then drove at once to Number 30, Kingsgate Street, and, finding his two men still on duty, ordered them to enter the house. The bell was first rung several times without any response, and then McQuade and his men burst in the door. There were no lights within, and, when the long-closed shutters were at last forced open, it was seen at once that the house was com-

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pletely unfurnished. We descended into the cellar, but found no signs of occupancy anywhere. The place had evidently been long closed. McQuade looked about in perplexity. Evidently there was a tunnel somewhere, leading from this house to some other in the neighborhood, or else the Chinamen had boldly carried us out through the backyard and into some house adjoining. The Sergeant explained the case to his men, ordered them to return to Scotland Yard, obtain a relief and investigate every house in the block, and even those on the opposite side of the street, since a tunnel might as well have led in that direction as any other. Personally I felt no great interest in the capture of the Chinamen. They had the emerald Buddha, it is true, but they had a better right to it than ever Ashton had, I fancy, and, now that he was dead, it seemed useless to bring trouble upon his relatives, in case he had any, by placing in their hands so dangerous an article. I was infinitely

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more concerned in determining who was responsible for Robert Ashton's death, and I could not see that the events of the evening had thrown much light upon it. I left McQuade and returned to my studio, agreeing to meet him there at three the same afternoon, and return to The Oaks with him. Just why he intended returning there, or why he wished me to accompany him, I did not then see, but I was only too glad of an opportunity again to see Miss Temple. The detective seemed especially serious and taciturn, and, in reply to my questions as to the two Chinamen from Exeter, he informed me that they knew nothing of the matter and had been discharged. I went back to my studio in rather an unpleasant frame of mind, took a hot bath, and slept until luncheon.

CHAPTER VIII

INSPECTOR BURNS' CONCLUSIONS

I WAS sitting in my studio, at about half-past two that afternoon, awaiting McQuade's arrival, when a messenger boy dashed up to my door and handed me a telegram. I examined the pink slip with some curiosity, but no great interest, when, glancing, as is my habit, at the signature first, I was astounded to see that it was from Miss Temple. It was as follows:

"Police have discovered weapon in your room wrapped in your handkerchief.

"MURIEL TEMPLE."

So strong is the consciousness of innocence that even after reading this telegram I had no thought of what this new discovery might portend to me. It was strange, I thought,

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that I had forgotten the thing. But I remembered now that, when I first found it, Sergeant McQuade was in Exeter, and, when he returned, the entire evening until a late hour was taken up with Major Temple's account of his and Ashton's adventures in China. The next morning the coroner's inquest occupied all my thoughts, and then came Li Min's arrest and our hurried departure for London. Since then, I had had no opportunity to converse at any length with the detective. I laid the telegram open upon the table, thinking that, if the Scotland Yard man did not already know of the discovery, I would be able to inform him of it on his arrival.

He came on the stroke of three, and with him was a burly, deep-chested, ruddy-faced man, with twinkling eyes and iron-gray whiskers, whom he introduced to me as Inspector Burns, of Scotland Yard. I bade them be seated, and offered cigars, which they refused. Both seemed a trifle con-

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strained, I thought. The Sergeant began the conversation.

"I have brought Inspector Burns with me," he said, slowly; "he wants to ask you a few questions."

I turned to the Inspector and smiled. I was quite ready to answer any questions that he might care to ask, and I so informed him.

"Mr. Morgan," he began, "about that cake of soap which, as the events of last night showed, contained the missing jewel cleverly hidden within it. Will you be so good as to tell Sergeant McQuade and myself how it happened to be in your possession?"

"Certainly," I replied, without hesitation. "I was in my room at Major Temple's house yesterday morning, and I heard someone moving about in the green room in which Mr. Ashton was killed. You are no doubt aware that the doors of the two rooms are directly opposite each other?"

"I know that," he replied, gravely.

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"I saw, by looking into the mirror on my dresser, that the person in the other room was Major Temple's Chinese servant, Li Min. He seemed to me to be acting very suspiciously."

"What was he doing?" inquired the Inspector, with a look at Sergeant McQuade.

"Apparently he was searching the room for something — I could not, of course, tell what. I left my room and came upon him suddenly, whereupon he pretended to be busily engaged in setting the room to rights. I had noticed, immediately upon entering the room, a strong odor of perfume, a queer, Oriental perfume that at once attracted my attention, because —" I hesitated.

"Because of what?" asked the Inspector shortly.

"Because it was the same as that upon the handkerchief which Miss Temple had left in the room upon her visit there the night before, and which was found there by Sergeant McQuade the next day."

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"What importance did you attach to that fact?"

"I do not know — I cannot say. There seems no explanation of the matter. But, at the time of which I speak, it struck me as being peculiar — I looked about and found that the perfume came from a cake of soap upon the washstand, near which I stood. It had evidently been left there by Mr. Ashton, and, being so natural and usual an object, must have been overlooked by the police when the room was searched."

"Why did you remove it?"

"Because I wished a means of identifying the perfume. I felt then, and still feel, that there was some intimate and unusual reason for the presence of that perfume upon Miss Temple's handkerchief."

"Mr. Morgan, why, since you were pretending to assist Sergeant McQuade by every means in your power to secure the missing jewel, and apprehend Mr. Ashton's murderer, did you fail to disclose to him

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the facts that you have just related?" The Inspector's manner was increasingly uncompromising. "Did you have any reason to suspect that the jewel was hidden in the cake of soap?"

"None whatever. I did not mention the matter to the Sergeant because it seemed too vague and unimportant — it indicated nothing."

The Inspector frowned. "Of that you were perhaps not the best judge. You committed a grave error. I dislike to imply that it might have been anything worse." He glanced at a notebook he held in his hand. I began to feel indignant at the tone and manner in which he was conducting his cross-questioning.

"Is it not true, Mr. Morgan," he asked suddenly, "that Miss Temple was violently opposed to any marriage with Mr. Ashton, and that either his death, or the abstracting of the jewel which was to have been the

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price paid by him for her hand, would have been of great benefit to her? ”

“ Miss Temple could have no hand in such an affair. It is preposterous! ” I cried angrily.

“ I do not imply that she could, or would. ” The Inspector was irritatingly calm. “ I merely asked you if such an event or events would not have been to her benefit? ”

“ I suppose they would, ” I answered, sulkily, “ if you put it that way. ”

“ Did not Miss Temple ask you to assist her in preventing this marriage, Mr. Morgan, the night before the tragedy, and did you not promise to help her in every way in your power? ”

“ This is absurd, ” I cried, now thoroughly angry. “ You will be accusing me of murdering Mr. Ashton next. ”

“ So long as we have not done so, Mr. Morgan, you need not accuse yourself. We only know, so far, that the jewel for which

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Mr. Ashton was murdered has been found in your possession."

The significant way in which he uttered these words thrilled me with a vague sense of alarm. There upon the table, before Sergeant McQuade, lay Miss Temple's telegram. It was open, and I felt sure he had already read it. My mind seemed confused — my brain on fire. The Inspector turned to McQuade. "Sergeant," he said, "you have the handkerchief in question with you, I believe?"

McQuade nodded, then drew from his pocket a leather wallet, and, extracting the folded handkerchief from its recesses, spread it carefully upon the table. He then produced a magnifying glass from one of his pockets and requested me to examine the surface of the bit of cambric and lace. I did so, and observed that it was covered with minute particles of some green substances, some very small, others of considerable size. I did not at first realize what they were.

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"Do you see anything?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes," I replied. "The handkerchief is full of fine green specks, but I cannot imagine what they are."

"They are bits of soap, Mr. Morgan," said the detective, as he folded up the handkerchief and replaced it in his wallet.

"Soap," I cried, more than ever mystified.

"Exactly!" The Inspector looked at me keenly. "Has it not occurred to you, Mr. Morgan, that in order to place the jewel inside the cake of soap, it was first necessary to cut it in two, and hollow out a space in the interior? Is it not also quite evident that anyone so hiding the jewel would perform this operation very carefully, so as to leave behind no traces, and that the bits of soap removed from the interior of the cake must have been carefully collected upon some object, this handkerchief, for instance, and subsequently thrown away, leaving the

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minute particles that you see still clinging to its surface? ”

“ Yes,” I replied, dazed. “ But who? ”

“ That, Mr. Morgan, is just what we are trying to find out. It hardly seems likely that Mr. Ashton would have gone to all this trouble, although it is possible, since he had reason, after his quarrel with Major Temple, to fear an attempt to gain possession of the jewel. If he did, how does it happen that he used Miss Temple’s handkerchief for the purpose? He may of course have found it upon the floor and so utilized it, but it seems unlikely.”

“ What, then, seems more likely? ” I asked, hotly. “ Would the murderer have gone to all that trouble to get the stone, and then have left it behind? ”

“ Possibly, Mr. Morgan, to have been recovered at leisure — as you, indeed, happened to recover it. Such a jewel would not be a good thing to have in one’s possession, immediately after the murder.”

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"But the operation of hiding the stone in the soap would have taken fifteen or twenty minutes at least," I objected, "and we burst in the door within less than ten minutes from the time Mr. Ashton's cry was heard."

"The alarm was given by you, Mr. Morgan. You alone heard Mr. Ashton's cry. Whether you heard it at six o'clock, or five, or four, rests upon your word alone. We do not accuse you, remember, we are trying to arrive at the truth. We do not imply that you hid the jewel any more than we imply that Miss Temple did so herself, and left her handkerchief behind as a mute witness of the fact. We do know that somebody did so, and the facts we have just stated, coupled with Miss Temple's refusal to explain her early expedition from the house that morning, all point to something we do not yet understand. With Miss Temple and yourself working together, much seems explainable that before seemed

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dark and mysterious. Even the closing of the window from within the green room may be explained, upon this hypothesis, for you had ample time to close it while Major Temple was examining Mr. Ashton's belongings in his frenzied search for the lost emerald. We are convinced of one thing: that the Chinaman did not commit the murder, for, had he done so, he would have taken the stone along with him, since that was the sole purpose he had in view."

"I do not agree with you there," I said. "Mr. Ashton may have hidden the jewel himself, and then the Chinaman, after committing the murder, may have been unable to find it. That would account for Li Min's subsequent search of the room, and his confederates' actions when they began to suspect, as Li Min no doubt did when he saw me remove the cake of soap, that the emerald was hidden within it."

"You are right in what you say, Mr. Morgan, if Mr. Ashton hid the jewel him-

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self. But the subsequent actions of Li Min and his confederates are equally explainable upon the theory that they had nothing to do with the murder whatever, and were merely attempting to steal the jewel at the first opportunity."

I made no reply. They seemed to be weaving a net of circumstantial evidence about me that, try as I would, I did not seem able to break through.

"We have alluded," continued the Inspector, "to your sympathy with Miss Temple, to the use of her handkerchief to hold the bits of soap, to the fact that you alone heard Mr. Ashton's cry and alarmed the house, to your presence in the murdered man's room at a time when you could readily have bolted the window from within, to your strange failure to mention the matter of the cake of soap to Sergeant McQuade, and to the fact that the jewel was found in your possession. We now come to another curious fact, which we trust you may be able

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to explain satisfactorily. The weapon with which this murder was apparently committed was found this morning, locked in a drawer in the room you occupied at Major Temple's house. It was wrapped in a handkerchief marked with your initials. Can you tell us how it came to be there? "

I turned to the Inspector with a bitter laugh. "I can tell you," I replied, "but, I presume, you will not believe me. I put the weapon, which was a brass-headed poker, there myself. I found it on the lawn outside of Mr. Ashton's window, the day before yesterday."

"Why did you also conceal this important piece of evidence from Sergeant McQuade?" demanded the Inspector in a stern voice.

I felt like a fool, and looked like one, as well, I fear. "I forgot it," I mumbled in confusion.

"You forgot it!" The Inspector believed that I was lying, and showed it.

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"Can you expect a sane man to believe any such folly as that?"

"Folly, or not," I replied, "it is the truth. I found the poker the day before yesterday, late in the afternoon. I intended to show it privately to Sergeant McQuade. He was in Exeter at the time and I placed it in the drawer for safe keeping. When he returned that evening, it was just in time to listen to Major Temple's story of his experiences in China, and, when he had finished, it was close to midnight and the matter had completely slipped my mind. The inquest the following morning took my entire attention and, after that, the sudden arrest of Li Min, and our departure for London. You know what has occurred since. I had forgotten the matter completely until I received this telegram from Miss Temple not half an hour before you came." I took the dispatch from the table and handed it to the Inspector, who read it with interest.

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"Why did Miss Temple send you this?" he inquired suddenly.

"I do not know — I suppose she thought it would be of interest to me."

"Did it not occur to you that it might be in the nature of a warning?"

Again I saw a chasm yawning before me. Every step in this miserable affair seemed to make matters look blacker and more sinister as far as I was concerned.

"Miss Temple has no reason to suspect me of any part in the matter," I replied. "Do you think it at all likely that, if I had committed the murder, I could have left such damning evidence as the weapon where the police would have been certain to discover it, and wrapped in my own handkerchief, to render my detection the easier? What is your theory of the crime, Inspector Burns, upon the present evidence? Reconstruct the events of that night as you think they might have occurred. I will not take it to heart if you do me any injustice, for I

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am as innocent of any complicity in Mr. Ashton's murder as you are."

The Inspector seemed impressed by my words and manner. He looked at Sergeant McQuade, who nodded slightly. Then he transferred his gaze to me. "I have no objection, Mr. Morgan, to outlining a theory of the murder which seems to me to fit the facts as we know them. It may or may not be correct, but it is my plan to work out whatever theory will most nearly fit all the facts in my possession, and then test it from every standpoint until it either fails, or is proven true. I shall be obliged to you if you will indicate, when I have finished, any points which seem to you not to coincide with such evidence as we now have before us.

"Miss Temple," began the Inspector, "knew that Ashton had her letter in which she agreed to marry him in his possession, and she also knew that, if Ashton delivered the emerald to her father in the morning,

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she would be compelled to keep her word. She detested Ashton — the thought of marriage with him was unbearable to her. She retired to her room, but could not sleep. At some hour later, possibly shortly after midnight, as she says, she went to Mr. Ashton's room, and was admitted by him. She begged for the letter — he refused — a violent altercation ensued — in her rage she grasped the poker, and struck him with it. He fell, but she found, by feeling his heart, that he was not dead. She believed that she had only stunned him, and set to work to secure the jewel. After removing it from the case, she feared to take it from the room. She had no wish to steal it, but only to prevent Mr. Ashton from making use of it. She hit upon the plan of hiding it in the cake of soap. In half an hour the thing was done, and the pieces, collected upon her handkerchief, thrown out of the window. She then set about leaving the room, but, on again feeling Mr. Ashton's heart,

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she found it very weak. She feared the result of her blow. To destroy the evidence of what she had done, she threw the poker out of the window into the grass, and hurriedly left the room, forgetting the handkerchief in her agitation as she did so. She returned to her room, but was doubtless unable to sleep, in terror at her act. Toward morning she decided to leave the house and flee, and, with this object in view, changed her clothes and shoes, but once more went to Mr. Ashton's room, to assure herself that he no longer lived. In doing this, she awoke you, either by accident or design. You heard her story, she threw herself upon your mercy, and you agreed to stand by her; you advised her against running away, but suggested that she go down and get the poker, which she had thrown from the window, in order that it might be replaced in the room, or otherwise disposed of. This she did. You meanwhile entered the room, bolted the door on the inside, and left by the win-

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dow. It is probable that you examined the body while in the room, and, unknown to yourself, your hand became stained with blood. On reaching the roof, you rested it upon the sill while closing the window with the other hand. You then re-entered the house by the hall window, meeting Miss Temple, who had secured the poker, and taking it from her. You placed it in your room, meanwhile urging her to retire to hers and change her dress and shoes. A little later you aroused the house with your cries and, upon entering the room, rebolted the window while Major Temple was not observing you. You later secured the cake of soap containing the jewel, as we know. You no doubt intended to replace the poker in the room at the first opportunity. None had occurred up to the time of your leaving the house, for the room was kept locked by the police until after the inquest. You entered it once, just before your departure, and secured the jewel, but Li Min's pres-

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ence prevented you from replacing the poker."

As the Inspector concluded, he glanced at me triumphantly, as who should say — dispute it, if you can.

I laughed, though with little mirth. The Inspector seemed so convincingly right, and was so hopelessly wrong. "Why don't you simply say that I killed Ashton, and put the weapon in my dresser, and leave Miss Temple out of it entirely?" I said. "It's equally plausible."

"Possibly so, although that would account for neither the handkerchief, nor Miss Temple's leaving the house that morning."

"She has already accounted for the one: she can readily do so for the other," I replied.

"That we shall see," said the Inspector, rising from his chair. "We will go to Exeter at once, and question Miss Temple."

CHAPTER IX

MISS TEMPLE'S DISAPPEARANCE

WE arrived at Exeter at some time after eight in the evening, and it was close to nine before we made our appearance at The Oaks. Inspector Burns and his companion had left me to myself on the trip down, and I occupied my time with smoking and turning over in my mind the curious events of the past forty-eight hours. I had no serious apprehension of any trouble coming out of the matter to either Miss Temple or myself. I knew that the Inspector's theory was a tissue of errors, although the facts, as he stated them, did seem to fit in with his conclusions to an almost uncanny extent. It was true I had agreed to stand by Miss Temple and help her in her trouble. Our conversation on

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the night of the murder had, I presumed, been overheard by one of the servants, from whom it had been wormed by McQuade's men during my absence. I began to believe that his willingness to have me accompany him to London was not entirely disinterested. But the thought that Muriel Temple could have delivered the blow that sent Robert Ashton to his death was preposterous. I knew that I was prejudiced in her favor, for her lovely face had scarce been out of my thoughts for a moment, since our first meeting. I knew that I had come to love her, that nothing could ever change it, and I realized that but two real bits of evidence connected her with Ashton's death — one, the presence of her handkerchief in the room and the curious use to which it had been put; the other, her early morning expedition from the house and her sudden return. The former she had explained, at least to my satisfaction, but the latter was still a mystery. If she would but explain

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that, I felt sure that Inspector Burns' theory would fall to the ground like a house of cards. Why she refused to do so, I could not imagine — that she had some strong compelling reason, I felt sure. She had told me that she went out that morning, with the intention of going away and thus escaping the inevitable promise, which she knew her father would insist upon her ratifying, to Ashton. She got only as far as the end of the west wing, and hastily returned. Why? — that was the question. Did she see anyone on the roof — and, if so, whom? Someone she felt she must shield at any cost — there could be but one — her father. Had she then seen him there? Did she think for a moment that he had anything to do with Mr. Ashton's death? I could not believe that even for her father's sake she would allow an innocent person to be accused.

We drove up to Major Temple's door at about nine o'clock. It was quite dark, and

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very cold. The house showed few lights, and it was some time before we were admitted by Gibson, the man who, with myself, had broken in Mr. Ashton's door. He ushered us into the library, where Major Temple sat smoking. I could see that he was suffering deeply. The affair of Mr. Ashton's death had told upon him, and he seemed nervous and constrained. He greeted us pleasantly enough, however, shook hands with the Inspector, and requested us to be seated. Sergeant McQuade, however, announced that we had come on business of importance, and that Inspector Burns desired to ask Miss Temple a few questions. Before doing so, however, he requested the Major to conduct us to the scene of the murder, which Inspector Burns had, of course, not had an opportunity, as yet, to examine. The Major rose. "My daughter has retired, I fancy," he said. "I have not seen her since dinner, but I will send her word." He summoned one of the

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maids and requested her to inform Miss Temple of our wishes, and then led the way to the green room. We were quite a party. The Major led the way with Inspector Burns, and I followed with McQuade, Major Temple's powerful mastiff, Boris, bringing up the rear. We first entered the room which I had occupied, McQuade using the key which he had obtained from the officer who had discovered the supposed weapon in my dresser drawer. The drawer was soon unlocked, and there lay the wretched poker wrapped in my handkerchief, just as I had left it. Inspector Burns took it up, examined it carefully, then brandished it as though in the act of delivering a heavy blow. "Hardly heavy enough, I should think, to fracture a man's skull," he muttered, as he replaced it in the drawer. "It is evidently the upper half of a long poker which has been broken off." He turned to Major Temple.

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“What do you know about this thing?” he inquired.

The Major looked puzzled. He had not seen the weapon before. I imagine the police had guarded its discovery carefully, and I wondered how Miss Temple came to know of it, in order to notify me.

“It is, as you say, half of an old poker,” he replied. “It was used originally in the lower hall, and the lower end was burnt through, owing to its having been carelessly left in the fire one night. I gave it to the gardener. He wanted it to use as a stake in laying out his flower beds, and running the edges of the paths and roads while trimming the turf. He had a long cord, and a wooden stake for the other end. It has been roughly ground to a point, as you see, so that it might be readily thrust into the earth. The last time I saw it, he was using it upon the pathways about the house.”

“Then it was not in the green room?”

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asked the Inspector in an aggrieved tone. He saw that his theory would already require some readjustments.

"Never, to my knowledge," said Major Temple. "There is no fireplace in that room, and it would have been of no use there."

The Inspector closed the drawer with a slam. "Then, if this was the weapon the murderer used," he said, rather lamely, "he must have taken it along with him. Let us have a look at the room."

We all adjourned to the green room, which the detective unlocked, and the Inspector went over the ground, as McQuade and I had done before him, without discovering anything new. The dark-brown spot upon the green carpet, which marked the place where the murdered man's head had rested, was still plainly visible, a grewsome reminder of the terrible tragedy which had been enacted there, but all else seemed ordi-

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nary and commonplace enough. The dog seemed strangely oppressed by the surroundings and, after sniffing about nervously with a low whine, crawled under the bed and lay quiet. We spent but a few minutes in the room and were just on the point of leaving, when the maid rushed in and, calling Major Temple aside, addressed a few low words to him, apparently in great agitation, at the same time handing him a sealed envelope. The Major took it from her, passed his hand nervously over his forehead, and turned to us. "Gentlemen," he said, in a frightened sort of a voice, "Miss Temple cannot be found."

We all turned toward him in intense surprise. "What does this mean?" asked the Inspector. "Where is she?"

"She has disappeared," replied the Major, as we hurriedly left the room, McQuade locking the door carefully after him. "Her maid tells me that she has

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searched everywhere for her, and she cannot be found. This note, addressed to me, was lying upon her writing desk."

"Read it," commanded the Inspector, as we all hastily adjourned to the library.

Major Temple opened the letter with trembling fingers. My own agitation at this new development was equally great.

He glanced hurriedly through its contents, his face ashen, his lips blue, then read aloud as follows:

"My Dear Father:

"I am going to London to see Mr. Morgan. They suspect him of the murder. I overheard the police talking about it this morning. I do not know what to do. I cannot let an innocent person suffer. It may be better for me to remain away altogether. If I must speak I can only ask for forgiveness.

"MURIEL."

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If the earth had opened up and engulfed me, I could not have been more astounded than I was when Major Temple finished reading this strange letter. What on earth had she gone to London to see me for? The poor girl, I felt sure, was laboring under some terrible misapprehension. I, for one, had no fear of anything she could say. I glanced at her father. He seemed shrunken and old, his head bowed upon his breast. Could he—? I refused to think. Yet he either feared for himself, or—God help me!—for her. No other emotion, no consideration for anyone else, could have so terribly affected him. The note plainly enough meant that Miss Temple knew who had murdered Mr. Ashton, and she knew that it was not I. But would the police so regard it? I looked at the cold, accusing faces of the two Scotland Yard men and groaned inwardly. In a moment the Inspector spoke. "Have you a telephone in the house, Major Temple?" he asked.

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"Yes," answered the Major, rousing himself from his lethargy. "In the hall, near the foot of the staircase."

The Inspector nodded to McQuade, who arose without a word and left the room. I knew that Muriel had not yet had time to reach London, that, when she did so, it would be to step into the arms of an officer. The net was fast closing about someone, but about whom I could not yet see. I was lost in a maze of conflicting thoughts.

"Mr. Morgan, have you anything to say in explanation of this letter?" I heard Major Temple asking me. His voice came to me as from afar off. I looked up and shook off my growing fears.

"Miss Temple writes as though she believed you would understand what she means," I replied. "I certainly do not."

"I!" cried the Major. "It's absolute nonsense to me. Why should she want to see you, unless you understood something between you? What does she know, that

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she should speak, and for what does she seek for forgiveness?" He threw up his hands in absolute dismay. If this were acting, I thought, it could not be better done by the most renowned actor on the boards.

"You remember, Major Temple, that your daughter refused to tell what it was she saw, or what happened, that caused her to return to the house so suddenly that morning. I advised her to speak — she refused. Had she come to me to-night, I should have given her the same advice as before. Nothing that she can say would harm me."

"Nor me," retorted Major Temple.

"Then whom, in Heaven's name?" I cried, speaking my thoughts aloud.

"You have heard my theory of the murder, Mr. Morgan," said the Inspector, coldly. "Why not herself? The note is plain enough. She will speak — she will confess and accuse herself before she will allow you to bear the penalty of her crime."

"Her crime!" Major Temple was on

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his feet in an instant, his eyes blazing. "Your words are ill chosen, sir." Poor man, he did not know of the damning circumstances which the Inspector had so cleverly woven into his accusing theory.

"Not at all, Major Temple," replied the imperturbable Inspector. "Sergeant McQuade is at present ordering the arrest of your daughter. She will be apprehended as soon as she arrives in London, and we will hear her story at the Magistrate's hearing to-morrow."

"But," I cried, in consternation, "this is ridiculous. Don't you see that —?"

"Mr. Morgan, the time has come for the truth. It is my painful duty to place you under arrest."

"On what charge?" I demanded hotly.

"For complicity in Robert Ashton's murder," he replied, and placed his hand upon my shoulder.

I spent a dreary enough night, nor was I able to close my eyes in sleep. I sat up

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in the library through the long hours, sometimes talking with McQuade, who dozed upon a couch, but for the most part engaged in interminably revolving in my mind the maddening problem of Robert Ashton's death. I had begun to regard it as almost supernatural in its mysterious and devious phases. I thought of all the detective stories I had ever read and tried to piece out some points of resemblance, some similar events, which would serve as a starting point for a solution, but I could find none. In all these cases, the various clues led somewhere, but here they led to nothingness. There remained but Miss Temple's story, and that, like all the rest, I feared would fail to prove a solution of the mystery. That she herself was guilty and that her story would be in the nature of a confession, I refused to consider. I loved her and I could no more believe her guilty than I could have believed myself so; yet I could not help remembering the advice of the

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witty Frenchman: *cherchez la femme* — seek the woman. The thing seemed monstrous, yet it persisted all through the long night.

I must have dozed, toward morning, for I dreamed that I was alone upon a wide field of ice, running madly forward toward a dim light that constantly receded as I approached it, and followed by a pack of hungry wolves. Their yelps and cries filled me with dread. I awoke trembling, and listened. Far off I heard the mournful howling of a dog, a series of low, unearthly howls, that would die slowly away only to be once more repeated. It seemed like the moaning of an animal in great pain. Presently, as I listened, there came a great yelp, and thereafter silence. After this I slept. About seven o'clock coffee was brought to us, and a little later we set out for the town.

We walked in, and did the short distance in less than twenty minutes. On arrival, we went at once to the headquarters of the

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police, where I made my first acquaintance with the interior of a cell. McQuade informed me that I would be taken before the Magistrate for a hearing at ten o'clock, and suggested that I had better employ counsel, but this I refused to do. I had made up my mind to tell the whole story as simply and exactly as I could and trust to the plain, unvarnished truth to see me out of my difficulties. I asked the detective upon our arrival if he had received any word regarding Miss Temple, and he told me that she would arrive during the forenoon. Major Temple and the servants were to come into the town a little later, in time for the hearing, at which they would be wanted as witnesses. I secured a morning paper and resigned myself to a tedious wait of somewhat over two hours. I was strangely calm and self-possessed. The ordeal through which I was about to pass seemed to give me but slight concern. But for Miss Temple I feared greatly.

CHAPTER X

MISS TEMPLE'S TESTIMONY

THE police court at Exeter was situated in an old building, and the Magistrate's room was small and cold. When I was led forth and placed in the dock, I felt at first confused and gazed at the crowded benches before me with a dull sense of annoyance. Presently I made out the troubled, white face of Major Temple, sitting near the rear of the room, and behind him Gibson and two of the other servants. The remainder of the persons in the room were strangers to me, drawn thither, no doubt, by the merest curiosity. I looked up at the Magistrate and found him to be a little, red-faced man, with a stern, but not unkind, face — a man, evidently, who had seen so much of human guilt and

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suffering that the edge of his sympathies had been worn off and replaced with a patient cynicism. The usual questions as to my name, age, residence and occupation were asked, and then the real business of the hearing began. The finding of the coroner's inquest was first read, and then Major Temple was placed upon the witness stand. The old gentleman looked more shrunken and old than ever. His face was yellow, his eyes hollow and heavy from want of sleep, his hands trembling with excitement. I could well understand his agitation. His daughter, even now under arrest, was hurrying to Exeter to undergo that most terrible of all ordeals, a hearing on a charge of murder. Whether or not her story would end in a confession, no one knew; that she had something of the greatest import to tell, her letter indicated. All these thoughts must have crowded through her poor father's mind as he took his seat and made oath to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the

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truth. The Magistrate began his examination with characteristic incisiveness.

"Major Temple," he said, "you are here as a witness in the case of Mr. Owen Morgan, charged with complicity in the murder of Robert Ashton."

The Major bowed, but remained silent.

"When did you first meet Mr. Morgan?"

"The night he first came to my house, five days ago."

"Never saw him before?"

"Never. Mr. Ashton offered him a place in his motor, on his way to my house. On account of the storm, he stopped there and remained over night."

"It is supposed that this murder had as a motive the securing of a valuable emerald in Mr. Ashton's possession. When Mr. Ashton first exhibited it to you, was Mr. Morgan present?"

"He was."

"Did he know the value of the jewel?"

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" I do not know. I think the matter was mentioned at the table."

" You had agreed to give your daughter's hand in marriage to Mr. Ashton, in return for obtaining for you this jewel. Is that true? "

" Yes," the Major faltered.

" Was your daughter opposed to this arrangement? "

" She was."

" And you insisted upon it? "

" I had given my word as a gentleman."

" The securing of the jewel, then, from Mr. Ashton would have released her from the arrangement? "

" If Mr. Ashton had not had it, he could not have carried out his agreement, of course."

" At what time did you retire on the night of the murder? "

" Shortly before midnight."

" After Mr. Ashton? "

" Yes — I saw him to his room."

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"After that you retired at once?"

"Yes."

"Did you wake during the night?"

"Not until I was aroused by Mr. Morgan's cries — about daybreak, or a little before."

"Was it light?"

"Hardly — it was just before sunrise."

"You did not leave your room, from the time you retired, until you heard Mr. Morgan's cries?"

"No."

"What did you do then?"

"I threw on some clothing and ran along the hall into the west wing. I sleep at the other end of the house in the east wing. When I arrived at Mr. Ashton's door, Mr. Morgan was trying to open it. My man, Gibson, who also heard the cries, came along, followed by one of the maids."

"Did your daughter join you?"

"Yes, almost immediately."

"How was she dressed?"

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"She wore a dressing gown and slippers."

"You heard no other cries but Mr. Morgan's?"

"No."

"What happened then?"

"Mr. Morgan and Gibson broke open the door, which was bolted. The maid brought a candle. I ordered my daughter to retire. Mr. Morgan and I entered the room with the candle and closed the door. We found Mr. Ashton on the floor dead."

"What did you do?"

"I began to search for the emerald Buddha."

"What did Mr. Morgan do?"

"He first examined the body of the dead man, and then went to the windows and examined the fastenings."

"Did he close or open the windows or fastenings?"

"I do not know. I paid little attention

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to him. I was greatly excited about the loss of the jewel."

"Could he have fastened the window without your knowing it?"

"I suppose he could — I paid little attention to him."

"What happened then?"

"After our examination of the room we closed and locked the door. We then had some coffee, after which Mr. Morgan went into Exeter and notified the police."

"Major Temple, there is a window at the end of the hallway in the west wing, which opens on to the roof over the porch. Is this window usually bolted?"

"Always. I generally see to it myself. I have a valuable collection and am afraid of thieves."

"Did you do so that night?"

"I did. I saw that it was bolted after seeing Mr. Ashton to his room and before retiring to my own."

This comprised the bulk of Major Tem-

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ple's testimony. There were some other questions, but they were of little or no importance so far as throwing any light upon the case was concerned.

Major Temple was followed by Gibson, who corroborated all that his master had said, and similar testimony was given by the maid. There was a feature of the latter's testimony, however, which bore more directly upon the case and my supposed connection with it. She had been, it seems, on the landing of the main stairway, sitting upon a window seat, after dinner, waiting for Miss Temple to come upstairs. It was her habit to sit there, she said, while waiting for Miss Temple. In this position she was almost directly above the latter and myself during the conversation we had had immediately after dinner on the night of the tragedy. She testified that she could not hear all our conversation — that she made no attempt to do so, as she was not an eavesdropper — but that she had heard Miss

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Temple say in a loud and agitated voice that she would "never marry Robert Ashton, never," and ask me to help her, and that I had replied that she could depend upon me absolutely. Immediately after this her mistress had come upstairs and gone to her room.

"Did you accompany her to her room?" asked the Magistrate.

"No, sir. She told me as how she intended to read until quite late, Sir, and that I could go to bed at once, as she would not require my assistance."

"Was this unusual?"

"It was, a bit, Sir. I 'most always helped her to undress, Sir."

"And you went to your room at once?"

"Yes, Sir. I did, Sir, and to sleep, Sir."

"How were you awakened?"

"I heard someone crying 'Help! Help!' I threw on some clothes as quick as I could, Sir, and ran out into the hall. Then I seen the Master run into the hallway of the west

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wing, and Gibson after him, and I follows them. After that, Sir, I went for a candle."

The testimony of the other servants was similar to that of Gibson and the maid. They had heard someone crying for help, and had rushed into the hall.

Sergeant McQuade's testimony was in some ways the most interesting of all. I began to see that this astute gentleman had by no means been as frank with me as I had been with him, and had made a number of little discoveries of which I had no knowledge up to now. He testified to finding Miss Temple's handkerchief in Mr. Ashton's room on the morning of the murder. He testified to finding the window at the end of the hallway unbolted. He produced photographs and measurements of the bloody handprint found upon Mr. Ashton's window sill and compared them with measurements made of my own hands earlier in the day. It appeared that, while the handprint was small, it could readily

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have been made by my hand, which, like that of most artists, is rather below medium size. He testified that he found similar marks of blood upon the window sill of the hall window, pointing inward, also scratches in the paint evidently made by someone climbing through the window from without. He testified to finding footprints upon the porch roof, made by someone either wearing soft slippers or in their stocking feet. These prints were made in the thin wet mold which covered the surface of the roof. He found traces of this mold on the white window sill of the hall window, and traced prints of it upon the polished floor of the hallway, from the window as far as the doorway of my room. He could not find any prints of this nature within my room, nor could he say that the person making them did not go beyond my room, but only that the footprints could not be traced beyond my door. The walking of many feet in the hallway between Mr.

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Ashton's door and mine had obliterated the marks and prevented his tracing them beyond that point, if they had indeed gone beyond it. They were small footprints, and somewhat indistinct, yet showing clearly as faint, dull patches upon the polished floor. They were clearly a man's footprints, although smaller than the average man's foot. Measurements which he had made of footprints which I had made in the gravel paths upon the morning of the tragedy proved conclusively that these foot marks in the hall could readily have been made by me. He exhibited drawings, photographs and measurements as he gave his testimony. I sat in the dock, amazed, wondering if by any chance I had suddenly developed somnambulistic tendencies and had performed these various acts while walking in my sleep. I felt that both the Magistrate and the crowd in the court-room were already coming to regard me as an extremely dangerous character.

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The Sergeant's testimony was extremely thorough and exact. He showed conclusively that no one had descended from the porch roof to the ground either by the vines, or by the lightning rod which I had foolishly supposed he had not observed, the day we made our first investigation. He spoke of the woman's footprints in the gravel path, from the corner of the porch to the main entrance. He then took up our trip to London, put in evidence the letter he had received, supposedly from me, summoning him to meet me at the house in Kingsgate street, explaining that the Chinamen had no doubt been uncertain whether I had the stone or had turned it over to him, and to avoid taking chances had decoyed us both. He referred to my offers of assistance in unraveling the case, and my failure to mention to him my suspicions regarding the Oriental perfume, or my taking of the cake of soap from the green room. He described Li Min's attempt to steal my

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satchel, and my facetious remark that possibly the Chinaman thought I had the emerald in my bag, which was indeed the case. Finally he spoke of the finding of the emerald in the cake of soap in my satchel and the weapon in the drawer of the dresser in my room, by his assistants, and the latter was produced and placed along with the other exhibits in the case. When McQuade had got through it was perfectly clear to the court that someone within the house had left the telltale marks on the roof and window sills and it seemed pretty conclusively shown that that someone was myself. I arose to be examined with a sinking heart. I knew that before now, in the history of criminal trials, many an innocent man had gone protesting to the gallows, and already I felt sure that, unless Miss Temple's testimony was decidedly convincing, I was certain of being held for trial as either an accomplice or the principal in Robert Ashton's murder.

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My own examination was short. I told my story as the reader already knows it, and I told it without any hitch or hesitation. If my reasons for taking the cake of soap from Ashton's room seemed weak, I could only inform the magistrate that they were nevertheless the ones which had actuated me. If my failure to speak of the matter to McQuade seemed suspicious, I could only say in reply that I had not thought it of sufficient importance to mention to him. I testified that I had last seen Miss Temple, on that fatal night, when she bade me good-night in the lower hall, and that I did not see her again until the next morning when she came into the hall in answer to my cries. I described minutely the manner in which I was awakened by the short, sharp cry of the murdered man, and the sound of his heavy fall, and fixed the time as not later than half-past five, as I had looked at my watch, mechanically, while hurriedly throwing on my clothes. I felt that I had made a favor-

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able impression, but I realized that the stern facts brought out by McQuade would need more than a favorable impression to overcome them. At the conclusion of my testimony I requested that the Chinaman, Li Min, be called to corroborate me as to the removal of the cake of soap from the green room. The Chinaman was already in the witness room, but, when brought into court, maintained a stolid silence, and even the most strenuous efforts of an interpreter failed to elicit from him a single syllable. It was at this point that the court adjourned for luncheon, after which the examination was to be resumed, with the hearing of Miss Temple's testimony.

As may well be imagined, I had no desire for food. Nor were my concern and inward fear of the afternoon's proceedings a result of any fear that I may have had upon my own account. I realized fully that the testimony of the morning had been heavily against me, but I would have gladly en-

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dured that and much more, could I have spared Muriel the coming ordeal. The thought that she might be coming to Exeter to confess, and thus free me from all suspicion, distressed rather than cheered me. That she had evidence of importance to put before the court I well knew. Yet whom could it possibly involve but herself? The Chinaman, Li Min, she could have no possible motive, I felt, for screening, and the only other person for whom she could possibly have such a feeling, her father, had been in no way connected with the crime, and clearly could not have committed it. The more I thought, the more I realized that logic pointed its cold and inexorable fingers at her; yet the more strongly did the love I felt for her tell me the impossibility of such a conclusion. I cannot express the tenderness, the love, with which this girl, in our few brief meetings, had inspired me. I longed to take her into my arms and comfort her, and tell

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her that the whole thing was but a wretched, miserable dream. Yet it needed but a glance at the stone walls about me, the steel grating of my door, and the untasted food which stood upon the cot at my side, to assure me that this was indeed no dream, but a very cold and stern reality. It was close on to two o'clock when I was once more taken back to the court-room, and, as I entered, I glanced about with an eager and expectant look, hoping to see Miss Temple. She was nowhere to be seen. I took my seat and waited patiently, watching the court attendants as they performed their routine duties, or the Magistrate, deep in the business of reading and signing a number of papers — warrants, I presumed, for other unfortunates — which were handed to him by a clerk. Major Temple sat in his former seat, so pale and still that I felt he had not left it since the morning, yet I knew he must have done so, if only to catch a glimpse of his daughter as she

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arrived in the custody of the officers. Presently there was a stir in the room, the Magistrate left off signing his papers, and, as I turned toward the door leading from the witness room, I saw Muriel entering, with Sergeant McQuade at her side, and Inspector Burns following them. My heart sank, as I saw how terribly pale and distressed she looked and with what shrinking she met the gaze of the many eyes now focused upon her. Her own sought the face of her father. He half-rose, as though to speak, then sank back into his seat and covered his eyes with his hand. She did not see me at all — probably because I was so close to her.

The Magistrate rapped upon the desk to still the rising buzz of conversation among the spectators, then, turning to the witness, for whom McQuade had placed a chair, began his interrogations. After she had taken the oath, and answered the usual

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formal questions as to her name, age, etc., he began.

"Miss Temple, you have been arrested in connection with the murder of one Robert Ashton, which occurred at your father's house on the morning of Tuesday last. The object of this hearing is to fix the responsibility for that crime, so far as we can, pending a trial by jury. Tell the Court, if you please, where you first met the deceased."

"In Hong Kong," replied Miss Temple, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Speak a little louder, please. When was this?"

"Last year — in October."

"He addressed you at that time, did he not, upon the subject of marriage?"

"He did, several times."

"What was your reply?"

"I refused his advances."

"Why?"

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"I did not care for him, in fact, I disliked him."

"You had a strong aversion to him?"

"I had. He seemed to me cruel and unscrupulous."

"Did your father know of this feeling on your part?"

"No. I did not say anything to him about it. He evidently liked Mr. Ashton, probably because of their common interest in Oriental art. I had no wish to prejudice him."

"When did you first learn that your father had consented to your marriage with Mr. Ashton?"

"Shortly after our return to England. He told me that Mr. Ashton had asked for my hand in marriage, and offered to secure the emerald Buddha for him as an evidence of his love and sincerity. My father, supposing that I would have no objections, foolishly consented to the arrangement."

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"But you objected?"

"Violently at first. Later on, when I saw how deeply my father felt about the matter, and when he told me he had given Mr. Ashton his word of honor, and that the latter had set out upon a life-and-death quest as a result of it, I gave an unwilling consent and agreed to write to Mr. Ashton at Pekin, withdrawing my objections to his suit."

"You wrote this letter?"

"I did."

"When did you first learn that Mr. Ashton had succeeded in his quest?"

"At dinner, the night of his arrival. I had not been alone with him, since he came but a short time before the dinner hour. He suddenly rolled the emerald out upon the tablecloth, and looked at me with a glance of triumph."

"After dinner you had some conversation with Mr. Morgan. What was it?"

"I told Mr. Morgan my story. He was

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a stranger to me, but I knew his name and his work, and I had no one upon whom I could rely. I told him I would never marry Mr. Ashton, that rather than do so I would leave the house, and earn my own living. I asked him to help me in any way that he could."

"And he agreed?"

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"I retired to my room, dismissed my maid, and threw myself fully dressed upon the bed."

"What time was it?"

"Close to ten o'clock. I heard the hall clock strike the hour shortly after I reached my room."

"Did you go to sleep?"

"No. I thought and thought about the terrible situation I was in. I did not want to leave home. I am very fond of my father — he is all I have in the world. Yet I could not make him listen to reason, in

MISS TEMPLE'S TESTIMONY.

regard to this marriage. He was mad to possess this miserable jewel. At last I heard my father and Mr. Ashton come up stairs, and, shortly after, heard my father retire to his own room. I made up my mind to make a last appeal to Mr. Ashton, to tell him under no circumstances to deliver the jewel to my father under the impression that I would marry him, that I would refuse to do so. I wanted also to ask him to give me back my letter and to release me from my unwilling promise. I sprang from the bed, ran out into the hall, and, without thinking of the consequences, went at once to the door of Mr. Ashton's room and knocked. He opened it at once, and, fearing lest I might be seen or heard, by someone if I remained standing in the hall, I entered. Mr. Ashton had evidently been examining the emerald, as I saw it standing upon a table. He had a pen in his hand, and was making a copy of the curious symbol engraved on the base of the

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image, upon a small piece of paper. He received me with protestations of joy and evidently thought that I had come to him as his accepted wife, but I soon undeceived him, and, after stating my case in a few words, demanded the return of my letter. He was very angry, and at first refused to believe that I was in earnest. He soon saw that I was, however, and became very brutal and refused to release me. He even went so far as to attempt to embrace me, and only by threatening to rouse the house with my screams did I succeed in making him desist. I warned him that I was in absolute earnest, that under no circumstances would I marry him, and then, seeing that nothing further was to be gained, I hurriedly left the room."

"Did you drop your handkerchief?"

"I must have done so. The one found in the room belonged to me."

"Did you by any chance observe whether

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or not any of the windows in the room were open? ”

“ I did. They were all closed. I noticed it instinctively, because, when I first entered the room, I was conscious of the heavy, oppressive atmosphere of the place and, knowing that the room had been long closed, wondered that Mr. Ashton had not opened the windows. I suppose it was because his long stay in the East had rendered him sensitive to our cold English weather.”

“ After you left Mr. Ashton’s room, what did you do? ”

“ I retired to my own room, partially undressed, and again threw myself upon the bed.”

“ Did you sleep? ”

“ No. I could not.”

“ When did you again leave your room? ”

“ About five o’clock. I had been thinking all night about leaving the house. I felt that, after the scene the night before

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with Mr. Ashton, I could not endure another meeting with him. I got up, put on a walking suit and boots, and, throwing a few things into a satchel, stole quietly down stairs, opened the front door and went out."

"Where did you go?"

"I — I left the porch, and set out across the lawns, taking a short cut to the main road to the town."

I observed that Miss Temple was showing a greater and greater appearance of distress as the magistrate pursued inexorably the line of questioning that would lead her to the disclosures which I knew she feared to make. Her face, white and drawn, twitched pathetically under the stress of her emotions. She spoke in a low, penetrating voice, little more than a whisper, yet so silent was the court-room that what she said was audible to its furthest corner. As I gazed at her in silent pity, I heard the Magistrate ask the next question.

MISS TEMPLE'S TESTIMONY

"How far did you go?"

"I went — I — I think it must have been about thirty yards — as far as the corner of the house."

"The corner of the west wing?"

"Yes." Her voice was growing more and more faint.

"Why did you not go further? What caused you to stop?"

"I — I saw somebody upon the roof of the porch."

"Was it light?"

"There was a faint light in the sky, of early dawn. I walked over toward the path, and looked up at the porch roof."

"What did you see?"

"I saw someone get out of the window from the hall, on to the roof. I — I — They walked over to Mr. Ashton's window and seemed to be trying to open it."

"Who was it?" The crucial question of all that had been asked her came like the snapping of a lash, and, as she compre-

"What — at the moment finished,
what —"

— — — — — "I answer that question
— — —"

"It — — — — —" she burst
out in a voice of pain as her hands
were laid on her young brother

"— — — — —" she said sternly
"— — — — —" it shall be evident

as the law will be settling with
— — — — —" a prisoner in

— — — — —" guilty of Mr. Ashton
and — — — — —" my question is

— — — — —" I direct
— — — — —" Whom

— — — — —"?

she looked down despairingly at
the man with a gloomy look from
his eyes and he murmured said: "I
was my — — — — —"
— — — — —"
— — — — —"

MISS TEMPLE'S TESTIMONY

cried, in a voice filled with incredulous amazement and horror, which rang throughout the whole room.

I sprang forward with outstretched arms, but Inspector Burns was before me. He placed Miss Temple tenderly in her chair: she was unconscious.



CHAPTER XI

THE VENGEANCE OF BUDDHA

WHEN Miss Temple launched her terrible and unwilling accusation against her father, and was hurried unconscious from the room, I realised that I was, to all intents and purposes, a free man. Whatever the circumstantial evidence which had been so cleverly brought against me by the Scotland Yard men, I knew that it could have no weight against actual testimony to the effect that it was Major Temple, and not myself, who had, early the morning, crept out upon the roof of the porch and entered Ashton's room by way of his window. Miss Temple, it is true, had testified that the window was closed, but she could not know whether or not it was bolted, or whether Ashton had opened

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later, before retiring, to secure fresh air in his room during the night. To me it seemed probable that he had. How to account for its subsequent rebolting from the inside I could not imagine, unless Major Temple had done it, unknown to me, when we first entered the room on the morning of the tragedy. I looked to see all these matters cleared up when he was placed upon the stand, and I was not surprised to see one of the officers in the court approach the figure sitting bowed and silent among the buzzing spectators and, laying a hand upon his shoulder, bend down and whisper a few low words into his unheeding ear. That Major Temple's arrest must inevitably follow his daughter's testimony was apparent to everyone. He arose and was about to accompany the officer to the dock, when there was a murmur of voices about the door, and I saw Sergeant McQuade enter with the ugly figure of Li Min beside him, followed by the interpreter, while In-

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spector Burns, stepping quickly to the Magistrate's desk, said a few hurried words to him in a low voice.

The Magistrate, apparently very much surprised, turned to the court-room, rapped loudly for order and motioned to the officer in charge of Major Temple to release him. Sergeant McQuade, meanwhile, with his prisoner, had advanced to the dock, and without further ceremony I saw the court attendants administer the oath, the import of this being explained to the Chinaman by the interpreter.

I learned afterward that Li Min, upon his first appearance as a witness, had been under the impression that he was being tried for his attempt to steal my satchel, and, as he did not then know that his compatriots in London had secured the emerald, feared to make disclosures regarding his attempt to secure it which would inform the police of its whereabouts. The interpreter, a Chinaman of the better class, who was in

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the habit of acting in this capacity for the police, had argued with him during the noon hour, had convinced him that he was not charged with any crime, that the emerald Buddha had been secured by his friends in London, and was, ere now, no doubt, on its way back to China. Under these circumstances he was at last persuaded to tell his story and, after an interminable amount of questioning, it was at last dragged from him. I have placed his testimony together into the form of a narrative, which will enable the reader to understand its purport, without being under the necessity of going through the laborious cross-questioning by the Magistrate and the interpreter which was necessary in order to drag it forth.

It seems that Li Min, a native of South China, and by religion a follower of Buddha, had associated himself with the reform movement in China, which has drawn into its ranks many of the most intelligent

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of the Chinese. Like many of his countrymen, he was under suspicion, and, knowing the enmity of the Dowager Empress and her advisers toward the movement, had come to Hong Kong with the intention of leaving the country. His engagement as a servant by Major Temple was for him a piece of excellent luck, as it enabled him to leave China without being under any suspicion as to his motives for doing so. It was during the voyage to England, and his subsequent stay in Major Temple's service, that he first learned the story of the emerald Buddha. Piece by piece he gathered the details of the story, and from frequent conversations between Major Temple and his daughter, which they carried on without regard for his presence, he came to know of Ashton's determination to secure the sacred relic. His religious feelings were outraged by what he heard, and he promptly communicated the whole matter by letter to a Buddhist priest in Hong

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Kong, with the suggestion that he send word to the followers of Buddha in Ping Yang. This was done, but much time had elapsed, and, when the word at last reached Ping Yang, Ashton had already escaped with the jewel. The priest in charge of the shrine, upon receiving the information as to the stone's destination, set out at once for London with two of his followers, determined upon the recovery of the emerald at any cost. They made such speed that they got to Peking a considerable time before Ashton arrived there, owing to his wanderings in the interior after his escape from his pursuers. They set out at once for England and arrived in London some weeks before Ashton's coming. They at once communicated not only with Li Min but with their followers in London, and a plan was worked out which would inevitably have resulted in the recovery of the jewel, had it been peaceably turned over to Major Temple as they supposed would be the case. Li Min

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was to notify them as soon as Ashton arrived at Major Temple's, and, after that, both he and the Major's house were to be carefully watched and the stone recovered at the first opportunity. They naturally supposed that the bargain between Major Temple and Ashton would be carried out, and the stone left in Major Temple's possession. It would then be Li Min's part to admit his confederates to the house and with their assistance steal the jewel and make away with it. When Li Min, in waiting on the table that night, first saw the emerald Buddha his impulse was to seize it at once and remove it from the impious hands of the foreign devils. This he was of course unable to do. He then planned to go into Exeter that night and send word to his confederates in London, as arranged, but, owing to the furious storm, and the impossibility of accomplishing anything at that late hour of the night, he determined to wait until early the next morning. He

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overheard the quarrel between Ashton and Major Temple after dinner, and the fear that the former might leave the house the next day, taking the jewel with him, had left him awake throughout the night, devising plans for the coming day. He arose about half-past four o'clock, but, as it was still raining heavily, he crept silently through the hallway of the west wing to Ashton's door, hoping to find it unfastened. Upon finding it bolted, he had gone to the window at the end of the hall, unfastened it, raised the sash and looked out. It was still raining, although not so heavily, and the light of early dawn was beginning to show in the sky. He made a quick decision to climb out upon the roof, enter Ashton's room by means of the window, secure the emerald and make his way as quickly as possible to the town, where he could place the jewel in safe hands. But, fearing lest, in the early morning light, he might be recognized by some chance early riser

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among the stablemen or gardeners, he descended swiftly to the main hall, threw on a long tan rain-coat and tweed cap belonging to Major Temple and, so disguised, returned once more to the upper floor and thence by way of the window to the porch roof. He was making his way quietly along to the window of Mr. Ashton's room when seen by Miss Temple, but he was so absorbed in his work that he did not observe her. Arriving at Mr. Ashton's window, he had tried it, only to find it bolted on the inside. The increasing light showed him dimly the interior of the room, with Ashton lying asleep in the bed. In trying to force the window he had cut his hand badly upon a projecting nail or bit of glass, but in his excitement he failed to realize it, and had rested his palm, covered with blood upon the window sill, his fingers pointing inward. His efforts to open the window had also resulted in some noise, which awoke the sleeping man within. What fol-

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lowed I will try to tell in Li Min's own words as rendered into English by the interpreter. "I saw the man (Mr. Ashton) rolling about in his bed. He seemed to be suffering, and I heard him groan and once cry out in his sleep. I pushed the window again, and it made a loud noise. The man jumped up quickly, and started toward the window. His face was white, and terrible. And, as he jumped from the bed, the hand of Buddha, the mighty, the wonderful one, who knows all things, smote him like a flash of fire. He fell upon the floor, uttering a loud cry. I was frightened, and ran along the roof and climbed into the house through the hall window. I heard sounds of someone moving about in the room of the young man (Mr. Morgan). I closed the window, but forgot to bolt it in my hurry. I ran quickly along the hall and went down the stairs. I put the coat and cap in the closet in the hall, where I had found them, and went out through the

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servant's entrance. I walked into Exeter and sent word to my brothers in London that the sacred relic had come. Then I had some breakfast and came back. Afterward I learned that the jewel was gone. I did not know whether The Great Buddha had taken it away or not. I tried to get into the room, but it was always locked. At last the dead man was taken away and I was sent to fix the room. I searched everywhere — under the carpets, behind the pictures, in the mattress of the bed — but I could not find the stone. At last the young man (Mr. Morgan) came into the room suddenly, and I watched him. He, too, I knew, was seeking for the jewel. After a time, he took the piece of soap and went away. I was a fool — I had not thought of the soap, which lay there in front of my eyes. It was the only thing I had not searched. I knew that, if Buddha had not taken away the stone, it must be concealed there. I watched the young

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man. I saw him put it in his bag. I went downstairs, and, after a while, when the satchel was left unguarded for a moment, I took it. The young man and the officer were outside and stopped me. When I was taken into the jail at Exeter, my friend, Chuen Moy came to see me. I told him through the bars what had happened. I did not know whether the young man would keep the stone or give it to the officer. I told Chuen Moy that they were both going to London in the afternoon. I told Chuen Moy to go to London and to inform our brothers that they might get the stone. I have done nothing wrong. The man who died had offended the great Buddha. He committed a sacrilege in the shrine and he deserved to die. The mighty hand of the all-powerful one was stretched out, and he fell dead. I myself have seen the miracle. It is the vengeance of Buddha."

I do not know what the effect of this

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weird story was upon the others in the court-room, but to me it rang with all the accents of sincerity and truth. Not that I believed in the vengeance of Buddha, although even that I was not in the face of the evidence prepared to deny, but the actual events of his story, as he related them, explained everything, and nothing. There were no clues which had not been unraveled and made clear, yet we were as far from the solution of the mystery as ever. My heart gave a great leap of joy when I heard the Chinaman's simple, sincere confession, and knew that, because of his disguise, his tan coat and cap, Muriel had been mistaken in supposing the figure on the roof to have been her father. For I knew that this terrible thing about her father, which she so firmly believed, and which she had for days kept locked in the recesses of her heart, must have almost broken it during those many hours of uncertainty and fear. Yet for my sake, she had told the terrible truth,

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as she believed it, and to save me she had gone all the way to London, to ask my advice as to the proper course for her to pursue. I realized what it must have meant to her to launch that fearful accusation against her own father and I began to hope that she might have for me a feeling not dissimilar to that which I so strongly felt for her.

There was some confusion in the courtroom when Li Min finished his story, several of the spectators began to laugh at what they considered a remarkably ingenious, yet ridiculous, defense on the Chinaman's part. As they glanced at the Magistrate, however, they saw nothing approaching amusement upon his grim face. On the contrary it was very evident, when Li Min had been taken back to his cell, that he not only believed the Chinaman's story, but had been very deeply impressed by it.

Major Temple was put upon the stand again, but his examination resulted only in

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a repetition of his former statements and a forcible denial that he had left his room from the moment he retired the evening preceding Mr. Ashton's death until he heard my cries for help the next morning. There was no evidence now to connect either Miss Temple, her father or myself with the death of the collector. Li Min had borne out my story regarding the taking of the cake of soap in every particular. I was discharged, along with Major Temple and Miss Temple, and only Li Min remained in custody. He was, of course, held upon the technical charge of assaulting McQuade and threatening him with a deadly weapon. Inspector Burns and Sergeant McQuade both signified their intention of going to London at once. The latter, however, arranged to come down to The Oaks the following day to make a final examination into the mystery. He did not believe for a moment that part of Li Min's story which referred to the sudden death of

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Mr. Ashton, and was already working on some theory, which he did not elaborate to me, whereby Li Min might have been able to open the window of the dead man's room, enter, commit the murder and rebolt the window behind him after he had left. If he could establish this, he felt sure that he could send Li Min to the gallows. I was requested by Major Temple, who seemed much broken in health and spirits by the events of the past few days, to accompany him and his daughter back to The Oaks, an invitation of which I was by no means slow to avail myself. The poor girl was greatly upset, and very much tired out, and we made haste to get her home as quickly as possible. I was too sick of the whole matter of Mr. Ashton's death to discuss it, although the Major broached the subject several times on our way back. I wanted to get Miss Temple home, where I hoped for an opportunity to have a talk with her, and to show in some way my appreciation of her

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efforts in my behalf, and her trip to London to see me. I had wired the caretaker at my studio in town early that morning to send me down some clothes, and I hoped to be able to appear at dinner in a more presentable costume than the walking suit which I had been forced to wear, throughout my remarkable series of adventures, for the past five days.

It was close to five o'clock when we arrived home, and I found my belongings awaiting me. I was given the same room that I had previously occupied and, when I appeared at dinner at eight, I felt like a human being for the first time since I had entered Major Temple's door. I was glad to see that both the Major and his daughter were much rested, and we sat down to dinner with some show of cheerfulness, Miss Temple looking especially charming in a green silk evening gown which to my artist's eyes made her a picture that I longed to put on canvas. I told her so, and

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we were soon discussing pictures, and art generally, at a lively rate. Only the Major seemed depressed, and I imagine this came from his regret at the loss of the wonderful emerald Buddha. He did not refer to it in any way, but I was conscious of a far-away look in his eyes which spoke volumes. What had become of the jewel, I did not know, but I fancied that McQuade's hurried trip to London had something to do with the search his men were making for the lost underground temple of Buddha and thought it more than likely that I would know more about it when he returned the next day.

We passed an hour very pleasantly at table, and after dinner Major Temple excused himself upon the plea that he wanted to write some letters and retired to his den, while Miss Temple and I sat down before the fire in the library for our first real tête-à-tête. It had begun to rain heavily outside, with a stiff breeze blowing from the

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southwest, and it seemed wonderfully fine
and warm and altogether delightful, sitting
here in the firelight with the woman I loved
beside me,

CHAPTER XII

I ASK MISS TEMPLE A QUESTION

“**M**ISS TEMPLE,” I said, as we sat beside each other on the big leather-covered settle facing the fire, “I want to thank you with all my heart for going up to London to see me. I know why you went and can never tell you how deeply I appreciate it.”

She looked at me with her bewitching smile, which somehow made me feel both delightfully happy and yet vaguely uncertain of myself. “I had to come, Mr. Morgan,” she said. “As soon as I knew the police were fastening their suspicions upon you, I knew I should be obliged to tell what I had seen. Yet I felt horrified at the thought of accusing my father. I could not understand his being where I im-

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aged I saw him. I knew his mad desire for the jewel and was filled with dismay at the thought that he would attempt to secure it by such means. Of course I had no thought then of Mr. Ashton's death. I ran to my room, threw off my wet clothes, and appeared in the hall just as your cries aroused the house. Li Min must have re-entered the house just after I retired to my room. I did not look into the hallway of the west wing. I avoided doing so purposely, as I did not wish to humiliate my father by letting him know that I had seen him on the roof. Of course I was deceived by the long coat and cap. My father is of about the same height as Li Min, and I had been so accustomed to seeing him in that particular coat and cap — he invariably wore them when walking about the grounds — that I felt no doubt whatever as to his identity. Had I found you in London, Mr. Morgan, I should have told you everything and been guided by your advice."

A QUESTION

"I wish you had found me there," I said, "but, as it is, everything has turned out well. Only I am sorry that you should have had to undergo such a terrible experience."

"Oh, it wasn't so bad. They gave me a very comfortable room at the police station in London, and the matron was extremely kind. I might have enjoyed the experience thoroughly, had I not been so terribly worried about my father." The dark shadow which fell across her face reminded me forcibly of the suffering she had undergone. I hastened to change the subject.

"Sometime I hope to show you London and my studio under different circumstances," I said. "I've got a lot of interesting old things there that I've picked up. You must surely come."

"Oh, I should love to. And your pictures! You must show me those, too."

"I'll be glad to. We will get up a party, some time. I've lots of delightful friends

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among the painters and musical people. You'd like them, I know."

"It's the life I've always dreamed of," she said, her cheeks flushing with excitement. "I've been to so many places, Rome and Paris, and Vienna and Cairo, and the East, you know, but I really know very little about them. The outside I have seen, of course, but the real life—that I have missed. And now we are stuck down here, where we don't know anybody, because father fancies it is good for his health. I suppose it is, but it isn't real, joyous living. I hardly feel alive."

"But you go to London, don't you? Your father spoke of his house there."

"Oh, yes, we are there a great deal, but father's friends are mostly professors of Assyriology and Egyptology, and people of that sort, and they come and stay for hours and talk about scarabs and hieroglyphics and mummies, and all that sort of thing. Sometimes I feel almost as though

A QUESTION

I were about to become a mummy myself."

She certainly did not look it, with her wonderful color, heightened by the firelight and her large and brilliant eyes. I could not help looking deep into them as I replied.

"We must prevent that, at all costs. Let me show you what it is to really live."

"Isn't that rather a large order? And we have known each other for so short a time, too." She laughed nervously, but did not seem displeased at my remark.

"I think the experiences of the past week have caused us to know each other very well," I said, gravely, "and I hope you may think as much of the friendship which has come to us as I do."

"Are we then really friends?" she said slowly. "I never had a man friend — nor very many of any sort, I fear. We have always moved about so much from place to place."

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I regretted my choice of words. I could readily believe that she would not find it easy to have a man friend, for he would at once proceed to fall head over heels in love with her, as I had done. "Perhaps not friends," I said, and, as I did so, I placed my hand over hers, which lay beside me upon the leather seat of the settle. "At least not friends only. I suppose, Miss Temple, that you will be very much surprised, when I tell you that I have never thought of you in that way. I have always dreamed, all my life, of a woman like you, who would be close beside me, and share all my hopes and dreams, and be the cause of them all as well, and be glad of my successes and not think the less of me because of my failures. But a woman to be all that must be more than a man's friend, Miss Temple — she must be his wife."

The color flooded her cheeks as I said this, but she did not draw away her hand. "A woman would have to be very greatly

A QUESTION

loved by a man, and love him very greatly in return, to be all that to him," she said.

"I can only speak for myself, Miss Temple — Muriel. I love you very greatly, so much indeed, that I am telling you of it now — when I have the opportunity — instead of waiting, as no doubt you think I should. But, were I to wait, I do not know what trick of fate might intervene to prevent me. Your father might suddenly be seized with the idea of going to India, or Japan, or somewhere else, and I should be unable to tell you what has been singing in my heart ever since the first moment I saw you. We have passed through much trouble, you and I, and that has brought us closer to each other than years of formal acquaintanceship might ever have done. I want you — I need you — I love you, and I shall always love you." I drew her to me, unresisting. "Do you love me, dear?" I said, and, when she put her arms about my neck and her head upon

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my breast I knew what her answer was, and that I had found my heart's desire.

It must have been half an hour later when Major Temple burst into the library, in a great state of excitement. We heard him coming along the hall, and I had made up my mind to ask his consent to our marriage as soon as he came in. I failed to do so, because he seemed much excited, and asked us at once if we had seen anything of Boris, his favorite mastiff. He had missed the dog that morning, before setting out for Exeter he said, but his mind was so troubled by the prospect of the hearing, and his daughter's arrest, that he gave the matter but scant thought. He had suddenly realized, a few moments ago, while writing some letters in his study, that the dog was not in his favorite place upon the hearthrug and that in fact he had not seen him since his return from Exeter. He made inquiries at once, but none of the servants had seen the dog since the day before. I remembered

A QUESTION

at once the howling that I had heard during the night and spoke of it. The Major thought for a moment, then raised his head with a sudden look of comprehension. "Don't you remember, Mr. Morgan, that Boris was with us when we made our examination of the green room last night? I do not recollect seeing him after that. We all left the room very hurriedly, you will remember, having just learned that my daughter could not be found. The poor fellow has no doubt been locked in there ever since, and it was his howls that you heard. Wait until I see if I can find another key — there are two about the house somewhere. Sergeant McQuade has the one usually left in the door."

He disappeared for a few moments, then returned with several keys upon a wire ring. "One of these will open it, I think," he said, and lead the way to the green room, Muriel and I following him. "Poor dog," he said as we hastily ascended the

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stairs, "he must be dying for food, or a drink of water."

Upon our arrival at the door, Major Temple tried several of the keys before finding one that would open it. At last the lock turned, however, and he attempted to push open the door. It refused to open, and felt, he said, as though some heavy object had been placed against it, upon the inside of the room. I went to his assistance and by pushing with our united strength forced the door inward sufficiently to allow us to enter. The Major took a candle from the room occupied by myself, across the hall, and we squeezed our way into the room with some difficulty, Muriel remaining outside. What was our astonishment to see lying upon the floor, his head close to the door, as though struck down in an effort to escape, the Major's mastiff, Boris, stone dead, his eyes wide open and staring, his mouth distended and still covered with foam, his face wearing an expression of intense fear,

A QUESTION

It was a horrible sight, and we looked at each other in alarm. "My God," said the Major—"this room is accursed. Let us go." He started for the door.

"Shall I come in?" we heard Muriel asking from the hall without.

"No—no!" the Major commanded. "We will be with you in a moment." He motioned to me to go ahead, and he followed me and closed the door.

"What is the matter?" asked his daughter as she saw our startled faces. "Isn't Boris there?"

"Yes, he is there." The Major's tone was grave and solemn. "He is there, Muriel, and he is dead. I do not know what is the secret of that room, but I shall never enter it again." He turned from us, and lead the way down the hall.

"Dead!" said Muriel, turning to me. "Is it really true?"

I assured her that it was.

She glanced at me with a scared sort of

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a look. "Do you think," she said, slowly, "that Li Min's story of the vengeance of Buddha could really be true, after all?"

"No, I do not," I said, though I was not so absolutely sure as I pretended to be. "It is hardly likely that Buddha would turn his vengeance upon an inoffensive dog, who had certainly done nothing to incur it. It is a curious and unfortunate coincidence, that is all. The dog has no doubt died of fright, caused by his unusual situation, coupled perhaps with lack of food, water and air. Or he may have dashed himself against the door in his struggles and died of apoplexy. I've frequently heard of dogs dying from some such cause, especially old ones. How old was Boris?"

"About four years," said Muriel, and I knew from the way in which she spoke that she did not believe my explanation of the affair in the least.

When we reached the floor below, the Major directed Gibson and one of the other

A QUESTION

servants to remove the dog's body from the room, and we all retired to the library, where we discussed the matter for a long time. Major Temple, on sober thought, was inclined to agree with my view of the matter, but in spite of our attempts to regard the event in a common-sense light, we could not shake off a mysterious feeling of dread at the thought of these two creatures, a man and a dog having so inexplicably come to their ends in this room. In Ashton's case, at least, there was a tangible enough evidence of the cause of death, but in the case of Boris there was none. Major Temple stepped out and examined the dog's body when the men brought it down from above, and upon his return reported that there was no wound or mark of any sort upon the animal that could account for its death.

Miss Temple essayed a few airs upon the piano, but our thoughts were not attuned to music, and presently, as it was close to

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eleven o'clock, she said good-night to us both and left us. As she passed me on her way from the room, she leaned over and kissed me upon the forehead, and I turned to find the Major staring at me in perplexity. Poor man, so many strange things had happened during the course of this eventful day that I fear he would not have been greatly surprised had I suddenly stood upon my head and attempted to recite the Jabberwock backward. I at once told him of my love for Muriel, and of her feelings toward me, and asked his consent to our marriage. "It is a bit sudden, I'll admit, Sir," I concluded, "but none the less real and true for all that."

"But, my dear Sir," gasped the Major, evidently very much taken aback by my flow of words, and my earnest and somewhat excited manner, "I hardly know you. How can you expect me to reply to such a question, to give my consent to your marriage with my daughter, when I

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know absolutely nothing of your position, your prospects, or your income? ”

I expected his objections and answered them at once. “ You are quite right, Sir, of course,” I answered. “ As for my income, I am making close to a thousand pounds a year from my profession, which, as you may know, is that of an illustrator for books and for the magazines. In addition to that, I have an income from my father’s estate of 800 pounds a year. At my mother’s death I shall have as much more. My father was Edward Morgan, of whom you may perhaps have heard. He was a well-known civil engineer, and railway constructor, and distinguished himself in India, in the construction of the great sea-wall at Calcutta. My mother is still living, and I know she would be most happy to welcome Muriel as a daughter, for I have no brothers or sisters, and she is very lonely.”

At the mention of my profession and my

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income I noticed that Major Temple's frown relaxed somewhat, but when I mentioned my father's name and the fact of his having spent a part of his life in India, he fairly beamed.

"Are you really the son of Edward Morgan?" he cried, rising. "Why, my boy, I knew him well. I was in the Indian service for fifteen years, and who did not know him, who has spent much time in that benighted country? Many's the time I've dined with him at our club in Calcutta. He was a fine man, and, if I remember rightly, he refused a knighthood for his services." He came up to me and took my hand. "It's all very sudden, I must say, but I should be very glad to see Muriel happily married, and, if she believes you to be the right man, I shall interpose no objections. But I should advise that you both wait a reasonable time, until you are certain that you have not made any mistake. As for me, I am an old man, and I have

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traveled all over the world, but the only real happiness I have ever found was in the love of my wife. She went out to India with me, and she never came back." He turned and gazed into the fire to hide his emotions. "I have become half-mad over this business of collecting antiquities and curios," he resumed, presently, "but it isn't real, it's only an insane hobby after all, and I have only just realized how selfish it all is, and how selfish I have been as well, to consider for a moment bartering my daughter's happiness for a miserable Chinese idol to which I never had any right in the first place." He drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it hurriedly.

I thanked him for his attitude toward my suit, and agreed to leave the setting of our marriage day entirely in the hands of himself and Muriel. Then, seeing that he was tired out after the long strain of the day, I bade him good-night and retired to my room.

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As I stopped at my doorway, I noticed that the door of the green room stood partly open, and, filled with a curious fascination, I once more peered into its dark and silent interior. I could see only the faint outlines of the tall, old-fashioned bed, against the dim night light of the sky without the windows. I stepped inside, acting upon the impulse of the moment, and striking a wax taper lit one of the gas jets in the heavy, old-fashioned bronze chandelier. The room seemed comfortable enough, although I felt that peculiar stifling sensation which I had noticed upon my first entering it. I looked about, and wondered for the thousandth time what strange secret lay concealed within its walls, what mysterious influence existed which was potent to strike down man or beast alike without warning, as though by the hand of death itself. I longed to penetrate to the heart of this mystery, to satisfy myself, at least, that what had oc-

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curred herein had not been supernatural, the action of unknown forces, but merely some working of well-known natural laws, obscure perhaps, but none the less understandable, if but the secret could once be grasped. Suddenly I was seized with an idea. Why should I not spend the night here, instead of in the room across the hall, and possibly thus determine the grim secret, which had set our reason and common sense at naught. The idea grew upon me, and so strongly was I possessed with it that I at once returned to my own room, undressed, put on my pajamas, and, taking from my dressing-case, which had been sent down from London, a small pocket revolver that I always carried with me and had never yet used, I crossed the hall into the room opposite, carrying with me some extra coverings for my bed. I did not feel at all sleepy, so, after closing the door and climbing, not without difficulty, into the high

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poster bed, I lay back comfortably upon the pillows and proceeded to occupy myself in reading a magazine which I had found lying upon the table in my own room.

CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT OF HORROR

THE night that I spent in the green room was in many ways like the one which Robert Ashton spent there.

A heavy rain had set in, and the wind from the southwest was driving it against the windows of the room, just as it had done that other night. I had attempted to raise one of the windows before turning in, but it was impossible to keep it open for any length of time as the rain drove in fiercely and threatened to flood the room. As I lay in bed, unable to concentrate my thoughts upon the magazine I had picked up, I began to reconstruct in my mind the scene which had been enacted in this room but a few nights before. I pictured Robert Ashton, sitting at the small, marble-topped

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table, laboriously copying the inscription upon the base of the emerald figure, for what purpose I could not imagine. I saw him as he opened the door for Miss Temple, his painful interview with her, and his anger at its conclusion. Then, no doubt, he sat down and thought the whole thing over. He remembered Major Temple's threat that he should never leave the house and take the emerald with him. Possibly he may have supposed that Muriel and her father were in league in some way to obtain possession of the jewel and thus defraud him, he felt, of the fruits of his labors. No doubt the question of where to place the stone, during the night, to insure its absolute safety, became in his mind an important one. He determined to hide it, and cast about for a place of concealment. To secrete it about the room would be impracticable: it must be so situated that he could instantly remove it if necessary. Yet to place it in his bag among his other be-

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longings would be no concealment at all. Probably he gave a quick glance about the room, and then the cake of soap, green like the emerald itself, lying upon the washstand, suggested a hiding-place which, because of its very conspicuousness, would be thought of by no one. To cut the cake in half, lengthways, with a knife or more probably a piece of thread, was the work of but a moment. The hollowing out of the chamber within, no doubt, took longer. A glance about for a scrap of paper or other material, to hold the bits of soap as he slowly dug them out with his penknife, revealed the handkerchief lying close at hand upon the floor where Miss Temple had dropped it. Soon the thing was done — the great emerald snugly placed in its improvised case, and the edges of the two halves of the soap softened with water and pressed tightly together until they were once more united. Then it was only necessary to use the soap once to wash his hands,

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and the telltale line between the two halves would disappear. That his plan had indeed been an ingenious one, subsequent events proved, for the room was searched, twice by the police, once by myself and Major Temple, and once by Li Min, yet of all the people bent upon discovering the jewel, not one had given the cake of soap, lying so obviously and properly in its china dish, more than a cursory glance.

Then I thought, what next? No doubt Ashton had turned off the gas and climbed into bed. I say climbed advisedly, for the bed, one of those old-fashioned four posters with a feather mattress under the hair one, was far higher from the floor than are our modern beds, and to facilitate getting into it, there stood beside it a little, low, wooden stool, by which one ascended to its snowy heights.

Presently, over my imaginings, I felt myself growing unaccountably sleepy and tired. I realized that the strain of the long

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day had been a heavy one. In spite of the feelings of horror with which the room had at first inspired me, I could see no reason for going without a good night's rest. There was no priceless jewel concealed upon the premises, to bring down upon me either the vengeance of Buddha or the murderous attacks of my fellow men. I laughed a little at my earlier fears as I rose in bed, reached over to the chandelier and turned out the light. The sighing and moaning of the wind, and the dashing of the rain against the window panes were the last sound I heard as I passed into a heavy and restless sleep.

I must have slept for several hours, during which I tossed about, a prey to broken and tortured dreams. At one time I seemed to be again in the underground temple of Buddha, and the glittering green figure of the deity seemed to grow and swell until it filled the whole room, forcing me down and ever down until I seemed to be chok-

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ing under its enormous weight. Again I thought myself imprisoned in a huge cake of soap, which closed about me slowly and with irresistible force while I vainly tried to force it back with my hands to keep from smothering. For a long time I seemed to be beneath a dark cloud which dissolved into glittering points of light, only to be swallowed up in darkness again. After a time I seemed to be struggling to free myself from a huge, soft object which lay upon my chest and threatened to strangle me. I discovered at last that it was the dead body of Boris, the great mastiff, which, try as I would, I could not free myself from. Presently the dog seemed to become suddenly alive and its huge, dripping jaws opened and closed tightly upon my throat. I struggled madly to extricate myself from his grasp, but I seemed to be slowly, but surely, choking to death. In a madness of fear I half awoke, trembling and weak, and, with a cry, thrust the imaginary body of

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the animal from me and sprang to my feet in the bed. I saw nothing but the faint light of the window opposite me, and with a mad desire for air I sprang violently toward it, my right foot, as I lurched heavily outward, coming down upon the wooden stool by the side of the bed. And, as I thus dashed headlong in the direction of the window, gasping desperately for breath, I suddenly felt a violent glancing blow upon the side of my head, that shook me to the very marrow, and stretched me stunned and unconscious upon the floor.

I must have remained in this position for several moments, although I had no means of knowing, when I slowly awoke to consciousness, how long a time my insensibility had lasted. Slowly my mind began to grasp the fact that something strange, almost unbelievable, had happened to me, although what it was I did not then understand. I seemed to be swimming in a vast limitless space, filled with light, which

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gradually contracted until it became a single glowing spark which seemed to be myself, my intelligence. This process of coming back, as it were, seemed to take an age, yet I know now that it could not have been more than a few brief moments. When at last I opened my eyes, and realized my situation, I was intensely weak, and still gasping madly for air. I seemed unable to breathe—my lungs, my heart seemed oppressed as though by heavy weights. I slowly and painfully struggled to my knees and raised my hand to my head, which seemed ready to burst with pain. It came away dripping with blood. The sudden shock of the realization that I was wounded, together with the sharp pain which the touching of the wound gave me, roused me to the necessity of quick and sudden action. I tried to rise, but my legs seemed made of stone. I fell over upon my side and then began to crawl laboriously and painfully toward the door. The chok-

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ing sensation increased every moment. For a time I thought I should never be able to reach it, and then with a rush I thought of Muriel, and all that the future held for us, and I made a last terrible effort, dragged myself across the few feet remaining between myself and the door, and, with barely enough strength left to reach up and turn the knob, managed somehow to fall across the threshold and into the hall.

I fell with my head and most of my body in the passageway, and, as a result of my almost superhuman efforts, must have again become unconscious. When I once more revived, I no longer felt the horrible sensation of choking which had before oppressed me, and I attributed this to the cold air of the hall. I felt very weak, and my head was lying in a pool of blood, but my senses were fairly clear, and I knew that I must regain my room and attempt in some way to stop the flow of blood from my wound. After some difficulty I managed to

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rise, and staggered into my room. My first thought was of a flask of whiskey which I usually carried in my bag. I prayed that in sending down my things from London it had not been removed. After groping about for a few moments I came upon it, and lost no time in swallowing the bulk of its contents. Under this sudden and violent stimulation I began to feel better, my strength began to return, and I managed to find a wax taper and light the gas. A look into the mirror caused me to shudder. My face and the entire right side of my head was a gory mass of blood, which, even as I stood there, dripped in heavy drops upon the white cloth on the top of the dresser. I hastily seized a towel and managed to bring my face to some appearance of the human, after which I soaked a couple of handkerchiefs in cold water and bound them upon the wound. It proved to be a long, irregular gash, extending from the side of my head some two or more inches back of



I BOUND MY HEAD UP AND THEN, RETURNING CAUTIOUSLY TO THE GREEN-ROOM, ENTERED AND LOOKED ABOUT ME.

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A NIGHT OF HORROR

the temple down nearly or quite to my right ear. It was still bleeding profusely, but the blood matting with my hair, had begun to coagulate and in the course of an hour or more, during which I constantly renewed the application of the cold water, had practically ceased to flow. I bound my head up, removed the remaining traces of blood from my face and then, returning cautiously to the green room, entered and looked about me. The light from my own room, and the gray signs of dawn without enabled me to see that it was empty. There was no silent figure crouching within, waiting to deal me another deadly blow, nor had I expected to find any. I took one look about, seized my watch from the table and fled. But, when I left that chamber of horrors, and closed the door behind me, I knew how Robert Ashton had come to his death.

On returning again to my own room I glanced hurriedly at my watch. It was nearly six o'clock.

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The stimulation of the whiskey had by this time begun to wear off, and I lay down upon the bed to rest. Presently I fell asleep, from pure exhaustion, and did not awake until I was aroused by a tapping at the door. I looked at my watch. It was after ten o'clock, and the bright morning sun was glistening upon the bare ground and the trees without, brilliant in their coats of frozen rain. One of the maids had brought up my breakfast upon a tray, and I managed to take it from her without exhibiting my bound-up head and generally gory appearance. The whole right shoulder and side of the pajamas which I still wore were caked with blood. I sent word to Major Temple that I would join him shortly, and requested the maid to inform him that, should Sergeant McQuade arrive, he be asked to postpone his final examination of the green room until I had seen him. In somewhat less than an hour I had managed to get myself into fairly presentable con-

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dition, and with my head bound up in towels that looked for all the world like an Eastern turban, I slowly descended to the main hall and entered the library.

Major Temple was standing with his back to the fire, talking earnestly with the detective, who stood facing him. As the former caught sight of my pale face and bandaged head, he stopped speaking suddenly, sprang forward and took my hand,

"Good God, Mr. Morgan!" he cried, "What's wrong with you?"

I tottered unsteadily to a seat, and laughed. "Nothing much, Sir," I replied. "I had a bit of an accident last night and got a nasty cut in the head. It's nothing serious, however."

"You look rather done up, Sir," said McQuade as he examined me searchingly. "Has Buddha been at work again? Major Temple has just been telling me about his dog. The thing is too deep for me. I've handled many cases, but this one beats them

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all for uncanniness, and downright mystery. I wonder if the truth of the affair will ever be known."

"Yes," said I, shortly. "I know it."

"You!" Both Major Temple and the detective turned and looked at me as though they could scarcely believe their ears.

"I know how Robert Ashton was killed, and I'm pretty sure I can explain the death of the dog as well. In fact, you came very near having a third mystery on your hands this morning, Sergeant." I smiled grimly.

"What do you mean?" asked the both of them, together.

"I slept in the green room last night," I replied, "and the thing that did for poor Ashton came very near doing for me as well." As I spoke, I felt my wounded head gently. "As it is, I fancy I will be all right, after the doctor has put a few stitches in my head, but it was a close call, I can tell you."

"You slept in the green room?" asked

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Major Temple in amazement. "What in the name of Heaven did you do that for?"

"To find out what happened to Ashton, and by the merest chance I did so. A little more one way, and you would never have known. And a little more the other," I added, "and I probably never should."

"Explain yourself, man," said the Major, somewhat testily. "What happened? Tell us about it, can't you?"

"I can and will," I said, slowly, "but not here. We must go there, before you can fully understand."

"Come on, then," said McQuade, and they both started toward the door.

At that moment Muriel came in, glancing about, I felt, for me. She came toward me, as I rose from my chair, with a happy smile, which slowly faded away and was replaced by a look of deepest concern as she saw my bandaged head. "Why, Owen!" It was almost the first time she had called me by my Christian name and it made

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me feel wildly happy in spite of the rack-
ing pains in my head. "What on earth
is the matter? Are you hurt?" She came
up and took my hand, unmindful of the
presence of her father and the man from
Scotland Yard.

"Not much," I managed to reply;
"just a nasty bit of a cut about the head.
I slept in the green room last night,
and, as I was just telling your father,
I managed to find out the secret of Mr.
Ashton's death, but I had rather a bad
quarter of an hour doing so." I smiled
ruefully and felt my turban to see if it was
on straight.

"You—you slept in that room!" she
cried, turning a bit white. "Why—you
—what could you have been thinking of?"

"Don't think about it," I said, patting
the hand she had placed upon my arm.
My realization of her concern, her love, her
fears, because of my possible danger, filled
me with joy. "We are just going there

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now, and I hope to explain to all of you just what happened. But I would not advise you to use it as a guest chamber, in future," I concluded with a slight laugh.

The Major lead the way, with Sergeant McQuade at his heels. The little man from Scotland Yard was all professional eagerness. He felt, no doubt, that his reputation as a detective had been brought into question. He had worked on the case for nearly a week and had succeeded only in arresting a number of innocent persons, while it was left for myself, a rank outsider, to discover the solution of the mystery which had so completely baffled himself and his men. I could not help feeling a secret sensation of satisfaction. The Sergeant had acted very decently all through, I had to admit, but I had not quite forgiven Inspector Burns and himself for the famous theory they had so carefully constructed, which resulted in so much suffering on Muriel's part, as well as a

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great deal of discomfort and unhappiness upon my own.

As we followed the others up the stairway, she took my arm and pressed it gently, and the look she gave me repaid me many times over for all the horrors of the night just past.

McQuade took out his key as we reached the door of the room, but I explained that it was not locked, and that Major Temple had opened it the night before with a duplicate key. The pool of blood on the floor of the hall, which had collected while I lay there earlier in the morning, still gave mute evidence of the experience through which I had passed. Muriel shuddered as she looked at it, but I hurriedly pushed open the door, and bade the others enter. I had no desire for further sympathy nor did I wish to bring about any dramatic climax. We all entered, the Major and Muriel looking about fearsomely as though they momentarily expected some unseen figure

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to rise and confront them, weapon in hand. When they had all got inside, I closed the door and said: "The weapon that fractured Mr. Ashton's skull has been in plain view to everyone, ever since the morning his death was discovered. There it is," I continued, quietly, and pointed to the heavy bronze chandelier which hung from the ceiling close to the side of the bed.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECRET OF THE GREEN ROOM

I DO not know just what my auditors expected in the way of an explanation of the mystery when they followed me to the green room — possibly some well-constructed or finely drawn theory. When I pointed to the chandelier, they all looked a bit nonplused, and nobody said anything for several moments. Then McQuade remarked, in his quiet voice, with a shade of comprehension in his tone and expression: “How do you make that out, Sir?”

The chandelier to which I had pointed was an old-fashioned one, of the kind in general use in the early fifties. It was, I fancied, originally made for a room with a somewhat higher ceiling. The ceilings in the wings of The Oaks were unusually low,

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and the extreme lower end of the chandelier extended to a point not much over six feet from the floor. I judged this, because I am myself five feet eleven, and I could just pass beneath it without striking it. It hung in the center of the room, and about three feet from the side of the bed, which, on account of its great size, extended far out from the wall against which it was placed. The chandelier was of dark bronze or bronzed iron, and consisted of a heavy central stem, from the lower end of which extended four elaborately carved branches, supported by heavy and useless chains reaching to a large ball about midway up the stem. Below the point from which these four arms sprung was a sort of circular bronze shield, or target, and from the lower face of this, in the center, projected an octagonal ornamental spike, about two and a half inches long, terminating in a sharp point. The whole thing was ugly and heavy, and seemed in design more

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suitable to a hall or library than a bedroom. Almost directly beneath it, but somewhat nearer to the side of the bed, stood the low bench or stool, not over five inches high, the use of which I have already mentioned. I explained the tragedy to the detective and the others as I knew it must have happened.

"Last night," I said, "I was unable to open either the window in the south or that in the west wall, because of the driving rain. The same conditions, as you will remember, existed upon the fatal night which Mr. Ashton spent here. For some reason, which I hope to explain presently, we were both nearly suffocated while asleep, and rose suddenly in bed, with but one thought, one desire, to get a breath of fresh air. The window in the west wall, directly opposite the bed, attracted us. In Mr. Ashton's case, no doubt, the face of Li Min, peering in from without, increased his terror. Like myself, he sprang up and dashed toward the window, placing his right foot, as I did,

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upon the low stool beside the bed. His first dash forward and upward, to a standing position, like my own, brought his head, elevated by the height of the stool, in contact with the spike upon the lower end of the chandelier with great force. The spike entered his head, fracturing the skull. He was a taller and heavier man than myself, and the force of the contact as he sprang forward and upward must have been terrific. In my case, owing to my having jumped from the bed at a slightly different point, I struck the spike only a glancing blow, which was sufficient however to render me unconscious for several minutes. I fell to the floor, senseless, but in a short time I struggled to my knees and managed, by crawling painfully to the door, to escape from the room. The interval, from the time I first fell to the time I reached the hall and again became unconscious, must have been very short."

"Why?" asked McQuade, who, like the

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others, followed my every word with intense interest.

"Because, had the time been very long, I, like Mr. Ashton, should never have risen at all. You would have found me here this morning, as he was found."

"But why?" asked Major Temple.

For answer I took a box of wax tapers from my pocket and lighted one. "Have you ever heard of the Cave of Dogs, near Naples?" I inquired.

"Carbon dioxide," gasped the Major with a look of comprehension.

Sergeant McQuade looked blank, and I saw that to him neither my question nor the Major's answer had conveyed any definite meaning. "Look," I cried, as I held the match out before me, where it burned with a bright, clear flame.

McQuade's mystification increased. I think he wondered if I were trying to play some practical joke upon him. But, when I slowly lowered the taper until it reached

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a point a few inches above my knee, and its flame faded away and then suddenly went out, as though the match had been plunged into a basin of water, his expression slowly cleared, and he gave a significant grunt. "Carbonic-acid gas," he said. "I understand. But where does it come from?"

"That I do not know, at the moment," I said, "but I think there should be no great difficulty in finding out. This room has been closed for a long time. Even when Mr. Ashton came here, it was opened for only a few moments. Neither he nor I opened the windows, because of the rain, as you know. Somehow, just how I cannot say, a slow stream of carbonic-acid gas finds its way into this room. It is the product of combustion, as you of course know, and is produced in large quantities by burning coal. It may come through the register from the furnace, or from some peculiar action of partially slacked lime in the plaster

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of the walls. Wherever it comes from, being heavier than air, it slowly settles to the floor, where it collects, becoming deeper and deeper, just as water collects and rises in a tank. "Look." I tore a few sheets from the magazine I had been reading the night before, which still lay upon the bed, and lighting them with another match, extinguished the flame, but allowed the smoke from the smoldering paper to spread about the room. It slowly sank until it rested upon the surface of the heavy gas, like a layer of ice upon the surface of a body of water. It showed the carbon dioxide to be considerably over two feet deep, and some six or eight inches below the level of the top of the bed. I knew it must have risen higher during the night, as it was its deadly fumes, closing about my pillow and beginning to enter my lungs, that caused my troubled dreams, as well as, ultimately, the feeling of suffocation which had caused me to awake so suddenly. A

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considerable portion of the gas had evidently flowed out through the open door, as I lay across the threshold, after my escape from the room.

"And that is what killed poor Boris," said the Major, as he watched the eddying whirls of smoke which settled and rested upon the surface of the gas. "Exactly," I said, "and probably Ashton as well. His skull was fractured, it is true, but the divisional surgeon at the inquest reported, you may remember, that the fracture was not sufficient of itself to have caused instant death. It was ten minutes or more, I should say, from the time I was first awakened by Ashton's cry, until we finally broke in the door and reached his side. By that time he had suffocated. The gas, as no doubt you know, is not a poisonous one, but containing no oxygen which the lungs can take up, acts very much the same as water would if breathed into the lungs."

Muriel looked at me with admiring eyes.

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I did not tell her that my father had intended me to be, like himself, an engineer, and that I had taken a pretty thorough technical course before adopting art as a profession. And, after all, the simple explanations I had made were known to almost every schoolboy with a little knowledge of chemistry or physics.

"I believe your explanation of Mr. Ashton's death is the correct one, Mr. Morgan," said McQuade, and he said it ungrudgingly. "But how, after all, did the missing emerald come to be found in the cake of soap?"

"Undoubtedly Ashton put it there," I replied. "He realized the enormous value of the thing and feared that some attempt might be made to take it from him. His hiding place for the jewel was certainly an ingenious one, and you will remember that you and your men searched the room thoroughly on more than one occasion without finding it."

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McQuade looked a bit sheepish at this. He walked over to the chandelier and examined its ugly-looking spike with deep interest. It was stained with dried blood and a few bits of hair still clung to it, but whether Ashton's or my own, we could of course not tell. There seemed nothing further that we could do, and, as McQuade said he intended going into Exeter immediately after luncheon to make his report, and have the authorities make an examination into the cause of the collection of the carbonic-acid gas in the room, as well as the stains of blood, etc., upon the point of the chandelier, I suggested that I accompany him, as I wanted to get my wound dressed without delay.

We set out, about an hour later, with Gibson and the high cart, and on the way McQuade told me about his attempts to locate the much sought emerald. It seems that after two days of effort his men had located the underground temple of Bud-

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dha, but, when they found it, it had been stripped of all its decorations and was merely an old cellar floored over. It appears that the Chinamen, in taking us from the house in Kingsgate street, had passed through an areaway back of the house, and thence through a gateway in the rear wall, into a narrow court, along which they had proceeded some distance. From here they had entered the rear of a house facing upon the adjoining street, to which the cellar belonged. The house had been taken, but a short time before, by a couple of Chinamen who wished to use it as a dwelling. They were seldom seen by the neighbors, and visitors came and went at night, unnoticed by the occupants of the neighboring houses. They had all, however, completely disappeared, and left hardly a trace of their presence. No doubt by now the emerald Buddha was far on its way toward the little shrine in Ping Yang, carefully secreted among the belongings of the old temple

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priest. I felt a sort of secret satisfaction at learning this, and I think Sergeant McQuade did as well. Certainly it did not belong in this part of the world, and its possession could have brought nothing but trouble and danger to all of us. I think Major Temple was glad, as well, although I never heard him mention the subject of the jewel again. I fancy he felt to some extent responsible for Ashton's death, or at least for having sent him upon the quest which ultimately resulted in it.

I had six stitches taken in my head by an excellent old doctor in town, who tried his best to find out how I had come by such a severe wound, but I refused to satisfy his curiosity, and drove back with Gibson an hour later, after saying good-by to the man from Scotland Yard. He never, to my knowledge visited The Oaks again, although I received a letter from him later, with reference to the investigation which the authorities had made into the cause of

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the accumulation of the carbonic-acid gas in the room which Ashton and myself had successively occupied with such disastrous results. It seems that the heating system in the house had been installed by its former occupant and owner, a native of Brazil, unused to our cold English winters. It consisted of a series of sheet iron pipes, leading from a large furnace in the cellar. The pipe which supplied the heat for the green room, whether by accident or design, lead directly from the combustion chamber of the furnace instead of from a hot-air chamber, as was the case with the other pipes. The consequence was that while the hot air taken to the other rooms was pure air, drawn from without and heated, that which supplied the green room carried away from the furnace great quantities of carbon dioxide, produced in the combustion of the coal. An old valve in the pipe showed that this source of supply could be shut off when so desired, and from this I judged that the

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owner of the house may have had the piping intentionally so constructed, with the idea of putting out of the way some undesirable friends or relatives. That such was actually the case seemed borne out by the rumors of at least two sudden and mysterious deaths which were known to have occurred in the house. Major Temple, owing to his long residence in India and the East could not endure a cold house, and the presence of this heating plant had been one of the reasons which had governed him in leasing the house for the winter. As far as I was concerned, I had not noticed the register in the wall at all, during the night I slept in the room, having forgotten its existence. I presume it had been turned on by Mr. Ashton. Had I noticed it, I should certainly have turned it off, as I particularly dislike to sleep in a heated room.

I reached the house about four o'clock and found Muriel awaiting my return in the library. Her father, she told me, had

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gone off for a walk. We had a great deal to say to each other, and it took us till dinner to say it, but I have an idea that it would not interest the reader particularly. We had a lively party at dinner, and the Major got out some special vintage champagne to celebrate our engagement and drink to our future happiness. It was late before I turned in, and I did not, you may be sure, sleep in the green room. The next day, I set out for Torquay by rail, to explain to my mother my long delay in arriving, and to tell her about Muriel. With my departure from The Oaks the story of the emerald Buddha, and the memorable week it caused me, is ended, but the blessings that came to me through it I had only begun to appreciate. I have not become a Buddhist, yet I confess that I never see a statue of that deity but I bend my head before his benign and inscrutable face, and render up thanks for the great blessings he has showered upon me. It has now been three

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years since Muriel and I were married, and they have been three years of almost perfect happiness. We think of making a trip to China, some of these days, and, if we do, we have concluded to make a special pilgrimage to Ping Yang, and place upon the altar of Buddha the most beautiful bunch of flowers that money can buy, as a little offering and testimonial of our appreciation of what he has done for us.

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